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MASSIVE

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SOMETHING
NEW, IT
JUST BLEW
MY MIND.”
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CLARK

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STARRING

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THE DRAGON

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THE
SANDMAN

PLUS

THE NEW PREDATOR

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SEE HOW THEY RUN

BLONDE

GRIMES OF THE FUTURE

✦ ANTONIO BANDERAS ✦ GEORGE MACKAY ✦ TILDA SWINTON
✦ WILL POULTER ✦ SIMON PEGG ✦ GEORGE MILLER ✦ AIDAN TURNER

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Welcome to

TOTAL FILM THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE



This month we couldn't ignore the behemoth TV epics hovering into view on the small screen, with Tolkien's famous appendix being unpicked to deliver 50 hours of sweeping fantasy spectacle in *The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power*. It's been like a journey to the fires of Mount Doom getting this issue together, so massive are the shows we're previewing, but that doesn't mean we're over film. Cinema is still our first love – the community nature of it, the joy of gasping with a crowd of strangers all suspended in dark-enveloped disbelief. I've watched a certain film four times this month at different cinemas and each time I've enjoyed the gang I'm with as much as the movie.

Hearing people squeal together at certain bits and discuss favourite moments on the way out of the theatre (and the aspects they hated) is as much a part of the experience as having a filmmaker's vision poured into your eyes and ears. I know the TF tribe feel the same way so we've brought you the best of both worlds, big and small screen, in this 'precious' issue.

Enjoy the issue!

JANE CROWTHER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
@TOTALFILM_JANE

CALL SHEET THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS



SENIOR ONLINE EDITOR
JACK SHEPHERD
@JACKJSHEPHERD

The Lord Of The Rings cast were abuzz with excitement – each one on the brink of international fame, but still friendly, funny and fiercely passionate about all things Tolkien.



NEWS EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

This month I sang happy birthday to Chris Evans... as part of a chorus at the UK premiere of *Lightyear*. The only person singing with more gusto was the six-year-old next to me in a Captain America t-shirt.



CONTRIBUTOR
ASHANTI OMKAR
@ASHANTIOMKAR

I had the pleasure of finding my inner Tom Cruise at the launch of Paramount+ in the UK, hanging on wires for the *Mission: Impossible* selfie challenge. Core strength required!



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
LEILA LATIF
@LEILA_LATIF

I was enthralled by *The Afterlight* at the BFI. It's a touring print of archive footage of dead actors, edited into the story of a single day, which decomposes every screening.



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
JAMES MOTTRAM
@JAMESMOTTRAM

Enjoyed chatting with the brilliant Antonio Banderas – or rather listening. The Spanish star of *Official Competition* loves to talk, talk, talk.



CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
KEVIN HARLEY
@KEVINSHARLEY

Decades after falling for the *Sandman* comics, I traced its lengthy trail screen-wards with the showrunner, stars and ace writer Neil Gaiman – who talks in perfectly formed sentences, too. Dream gig.

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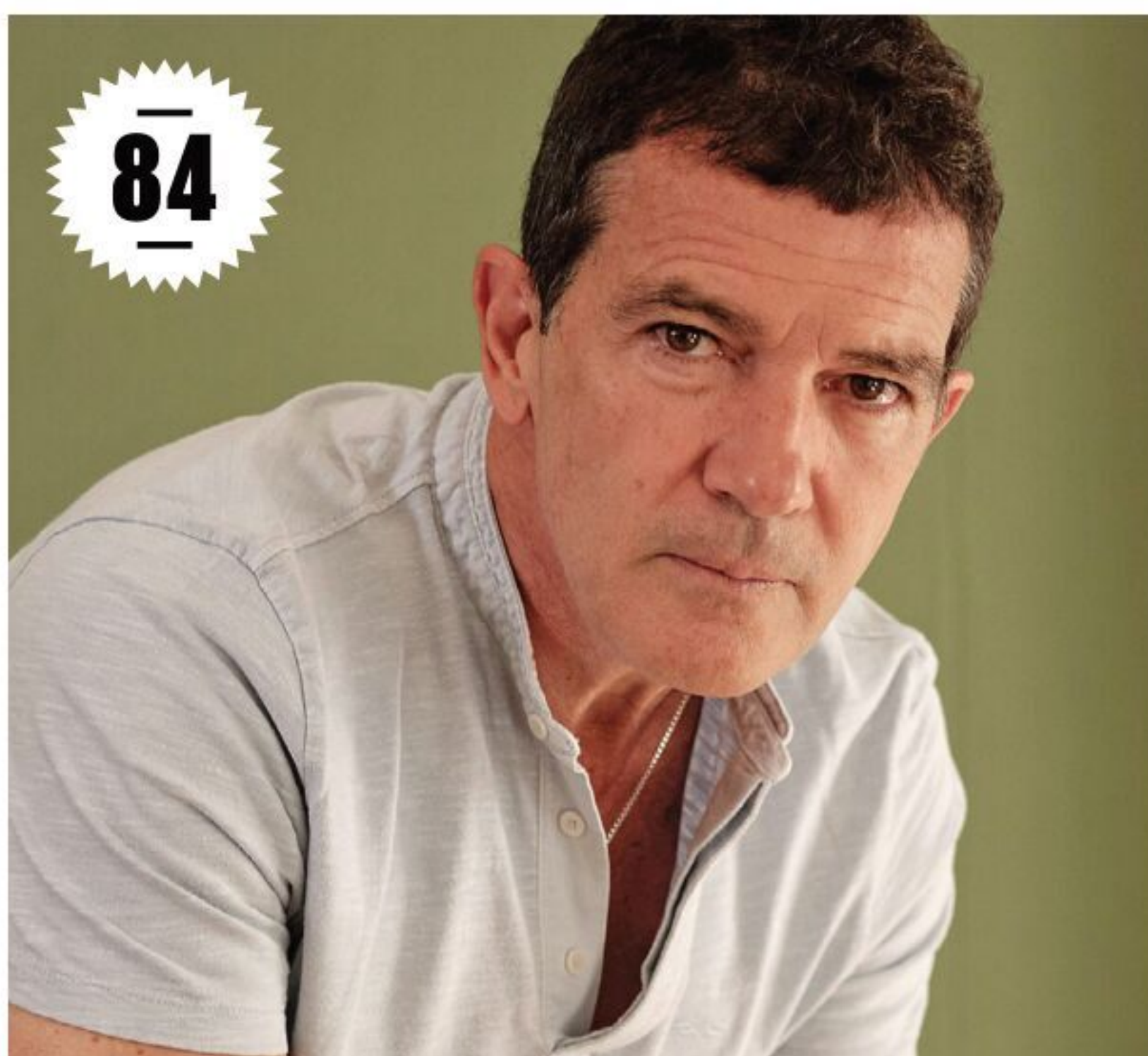
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BREADCRUMBS...’



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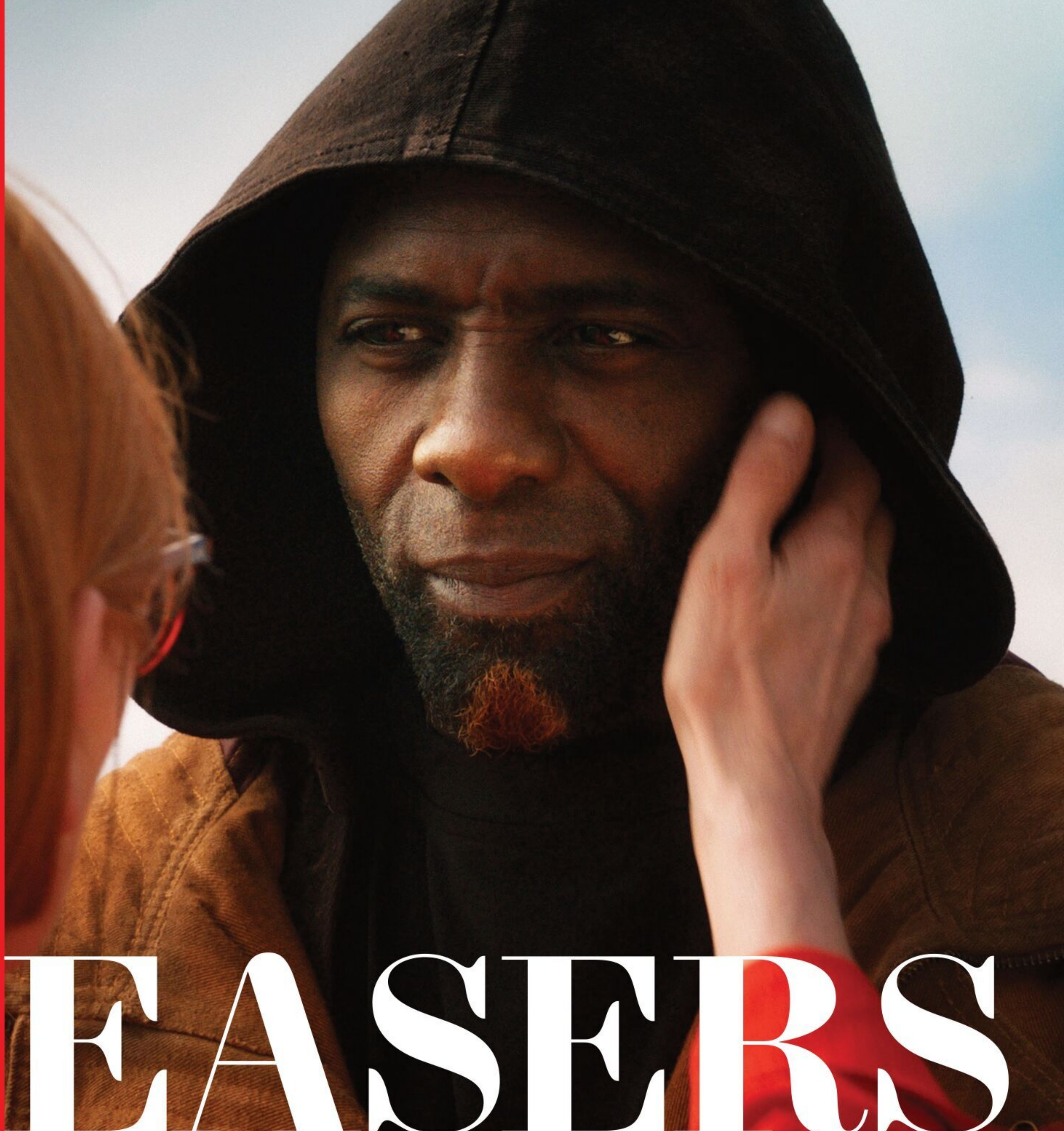
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EDITED BY
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY



TEASERS

DJINN & TONIC

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF LONGING George Miller serves up the anti-Mad Max...

Good things come to those who wait. Even George Miller. The genial Australian director has spent over 20 years, on and off, getting his latest film, *Three Thousand Years Of Longing*, to the screens. He first read A.S. Byatt's novella, *The Djinn In The Nightingale's Eye*, in the late '90s, snapping up the film rights from the Booker Prize-winning author after paying her a visit. He then started noodling away on the script with daughter Augusta Gore, although other projects – *Happy Feet* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* – took precedence.

Finally, Miller's gotten around to making it – a beguiling love letter to the art of storytelling and a film that he's already dubbed “the anti-*Mad Max*” for its palate-cleansing properties. Arriving seven years after *Fury Road* roared its

way onto screens, it couldn't be more different to that chase epic. “That was a film that happened over three days in a vast landscape, outdoors, with very few words,” the genial genius tells *Teasers*. “This was the complete opposite; this

happens over 3,000 years, in a confined space... with a lot of words!”

The “confined space” is a hotel room in Istanbul, where lonely academic Dr. Alithea Binnie (Tilda Swinton) is staying while attending a conference. After buying a small vase in a shop and cleaning it in her bathroom, a Djinn (Idris Elba) appears, offering her three wishes. Initially refusing, she instead listens to the Djinn's story – one of confinement and contemplation that sees him journey across three millennia. For Swinton, it's the perfect fairytale. ➤➤

➤ “To me, I always felt like we were making a kind of live Miyazaki movie,” she explains, nodding to the Japanese animation maestro behind *Spirited Away*. “It’s got that slight sense to it, that feeling of it being slightly animated.” Certainly, as the Djinn waxes lyrical, Miller’s frequent cuts to an exotic *Arabian Nights*-style tale boast the same magic as a Miyazaki film. “The Djinn is story and cinema,” the director adds. “In my mind, he projects it in her head. What we’re seeing is what’s in her head.”

With Swinton sitting alongside Miller in a white-walled Cannes hotel room resembling the one in the film, the Scottish star is unstinting in her praise. Calling it a “whirlwind romance” – they met five years ago, just round the corner from our current location – she seems delighted to add the 77-year-old to the list of esteemed directors (Bong Joon-ho, Wes Anderson, Jim Jarmusch, to name but three) she’s worked with.

“I had a moment one day when I thought, ‘I never got to work with [Alfred] Hitchcock, but I got to work with George Miller,’” she gushes. “The film geek in me, on the set... seeing the way he tells the story of every shot through working with the camera and the angles and the timing of when the camera should come off the bottle onto your reaction; all of that, that’s directing. And that’s not ‘smash grab’ montage. It is very Hitchcockian. As Hitchcock said: ‘Let the camera tell the story, and the dialogue can just lend atmosphere.’”

For Miller, it was a huge gear change from shooting *Fury Road*, which saw him orchestrate the 21st century’s greatest onscreen car chase, as multiple vehicles tore through the Namibian desert. Did he find himself yearning for an action sequence or two as he made this? “There’s not necessarily any ease to it,” he says. “If you said, ‘Would you rather go out and put an action sequence together or do a scene in a hotel room?’, I’d say: ‘What’s the story?’ You’re using different sort of notes and language for them. They’re a little bit different. But the central creative problems are the same.”

‘It deals with all the big issues of life. All the things that resonate with us.’

GEORGE MILLER



Tilda Swinton's Althea is about to make a very fateful purchase...

Indeed, one advantage of spending time on the script of *Three Thousand Years... was the advancement in digital effects, allowing for truly eye-catching moments when the shoot got under way in Sydney. But it wasn't all CGI trickery. Sometimes, the simplest solutions were the best, like the Djinn's giant foot appearing in the hotel room. “When he's really, really big, that was shot in a miniature hotel room,” explains Miller. “You can do that – with a little iPad, little books, and little tables and chairs, and things like that.”*

In the full-size hotel scenes, Elba was present next to Swinton. “Idris was in the room, and he was Idris-sized,” she confirms. “But there were various wonderful, geeky details that went into making me capable of looking [up] that high. At certain points, he wore very high shoes [or] he stood on things.” Still, employing these old-school techniques paled next to just watching Swinton and Elba go head-to-head for the first time. “It was like I was a tennis coach, and they were both responding to each other,” says Miller.

Palate cleansed, Miller is now returning the *Mad Max* universe, as shooting begins in Australia on his prequel *Furiosa*. But just why did he cling onto Byatt’s story for so long? “It deals with all the big issues of life. All the things that resonate with us. What is love? And how does it manifest? How do you know it’s love? Is it real, or is it a madness? What’s mortality when you come across a creature who theoretically can live indefinitely? What’s real or not?” Age-old questions that we’ll be pondering for another three thousand years yet. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF LONGING OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 SEPTEMBER.



Swinton and Idris Elba play off each other as Althea and an ancient Djinn.



For sale: Small ornate vase. Warning: May contain powerful spirits beyond your imagination.

You most certainly ain't
never had a friend like him...



Director George Miller (centre)
goes through a scene with his
stars, Swinton and Elba.



HOT RIGHT NOW

LADY GAGA

IS READY TO BE CROWNED QUINN...

With *A Star Is Born*, Lady Gaga took a familiar role and owned it. If rumours deliver, she seems set to try a similar trick in the musical sequel to one of 2019's hottest talking points. As we go to press, Gaga is reportedly under consideration to join director Todd Phillips' *Joker: Folie À Deux* as Harley Quinn, a role made to measure like the finest cuts-of-meat dress.

A chameleonic pop firework with a taste for the theatrical, the New York-born Stefani Germanotta has previous with the kinds of fashion statements and wily moves Quinn might approve of. She has a show-stopper of a voice, too; put it alongside music from Oscar-winning *Joker* composer Hildur Guðnadóttir (presumably returning, please) and there may be more smiles on awards

night. And while *Joker* stoked controversy for its supposed incel appeal, Gaga might just mobilise a wider fanbase. Can we start calling them Harley's little monsters?

One more thing: boy, can she act. Gaga brought great presence and range to *A Star Is Born*'s Ally, commanding the screen whether dressed down on the pavement, slaying festival crowds with *that* blast-off 'Shallow' moment or holding the heart-rending closing shot. If the Oscar for Best Original Song was a shoo-in, a Best Actress win would have been equally welcome.

Previously, she was suitably witchy and vampiric in *American Horror Story*'s Roanoke and Hotel arcs. And she played to her slippery skill-set extravagantly as a masked assassin in *Machete Kills*; wielding guns and trashing

vehicles, Gaga took to the OTT occasion with tangible commitment.

Though the material differed, her performance as socialite Patrizia Reggiani in Ridley Scott's *House Of Gucci* gave those unfiltered instincts fresh focus. She went total Method for Reggiani, drawing on personal trauma and her years at the Lee Strasberg Institute – she wanted to act before becoming a singer – to deliver a performance of controlled, fully felt excess as the righteous woman scorned. "I bled humanity into this character in every cell of my being," she said. In short, she would make a killer Quinn. Gotham won't know what hit it. **KEVIN HARLEY**

JOKER: FOLIE À DEUX IS CURRENTLY IN PRE-PRODUCTION.

The friends' drinking game turns very messy, very fast.



EXCLUSIVE

WICKED GAMES

BODIES BODIES BODIES A24's acclaimed horror takes a sly look at dysfunctional friendship.

Halina Reijn is not the most obvious filmmaker to take on a Gen Z horror-comedy, having made a name for herself in “Dutch hardcore theatre”, but she teamed up with A24 to bring Sarah DeLappe’s screenplay to life. Assembling a cast of screaming-hot young actors, including Amandla Stenberg, Maria Bakalova and Pete Davidson, the film is about a group of privileged twentysomethings reuniting at a remote mansion that looks like if “Sofia Coppola voted Trump”.

The plan – to have fun and make passive aggressive digs at one another – takes a turn for the murderous when they play a drinking game called ‘Bodies Bodies Bodies’. Reijn, who had grown up playing the game, tells *Teasers* that murder aside, such games always have “really bad consequences”.

With simmering tensions inside and a hurricane outside, the house becomes “*Lord Of The Flies* meets *Mean Girls* – that was my pitch to A24,” Reijn smiles. But with Gen Z, Reijn notes, you don’t need to strand the characters on an island: “You can just cut the wifi.” As much as Gen Z are mocked for their attachment to devices, Reijn wanted to paint a broader picture and “use this as a vehicle to talk about this time, about narcissism and the lack of being in the moment.”

The satire about Gen Z remains playful but loving, with Reijn hoping the audience will recognise their behaviour among the screams and tears. There is also a surprising presence in Lee Pace, playing the older date of one of the gang who brings out a competitive streak in Pete Davidson’s host. “Sarah DeLappe and I thought it would be really funny if one of the girls just brought a dinner date, which of course you don’t do,” Reijn laughs. But Pace also served as a surrogate for Reijn: “Being 46 I was also just observing these kids, with all their habits and rituals.”

While much of the cast have reputations as actors that precede them, *SNL* alum and tabloid fixture Davidson came to the role feeling like he had something to prove. “He



Lee Pace and Pete Davidson co-star as Greg and David.

really wants to be a serious actor and when I saw his stand-up, I could see he has something more,” Reijn says. “In his other films he’s goofy, and I wanted to have this darkness. He was really ready.”

Star-turning performances, laughs and gore aside, the most important thing for Reijn was that *Bodies Bodies Bodies* touched on something more profound. “I thought it was a great metaphor for wanting to belong,” Reijn notes. “We all feel so fucking lonely. It’s a fun film and you’re looking at these very annoying people, but they are very seductive at the same time.”

LEILA LATIF

BODIES BODIES BODIES OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 SEPTEMBER.

‘I thought it was a great metaphor for wanting to belong’
HALINA REIJN

FIRST WORD

DARK STAR

BLONDE Andrew Dominik is about to drop a bombshell...

Between Mark ‘Chopper’ Read, Jesse James and Nick Cave, director Andrew Dominik’s films have gravitated towards mythologised men laden with charisma. For his latest project, he’s ringing the changes. Focused on one of Hollywood’s most mythologised women, *Blonde* is the story of Marilyn Monroe, the ’50s superstar who died in 1962, aged 36.

Adapted from a 2000 novel by US writer Joyce Carol Oates, *Blonde* is a passion project for Dominik. Development stretches back to 2010; Naomi Watts and Jessica Chastain were attached, long before Ana de Armas signed up. But the crux of Dominik’s attachment to *Blonde* stayed firm. “The thing about my films is that the feelings they give you always survive,” he tells *Teasers*.

Immortalised on film, T-shirts, posters and otherwise, Monroe often inspires image-obsessed film portraits. Dominik’s aim was to dig deeper, inside the feelings that shaped her. “The book gave me a way to tell a story that I’ve always wanted to do... about how a person is shaped by the childhood drama. They actually don’t see the world at all, all they see is their own drama that they’re projecting on to the world. That’s what *Blonde* is.”

In Monroe’s case, that childhood drama was acute. “What it’s concerned with is that she’s an unloved child who becomes the most desired woman in the world. But if your mother wants you to be dead, there’s a part of you that’s going to try to fulfil that ambition... I feel like we all understand that something was very wrong around Marilyn. I mean, she killed herself. That’s a pretty extreme thing to do.”

Zeroing in on the tension between Monroe’s private and public lives, *Blonde* seems unlikely to tiptoe around her struggles. Whether or not the much-discussed NC-17 rating backs that impression up, Dominik certainly flags up an intense immersion in Marilyn’s fractured mindset: “It’s almost like a story of the unconscious overwhelming the rational. The meaning of so many things is turned inside out... And we, the audience, are the only ones who understand her. Everybody else in the story has no idea what’s going on with her but we understand it. And there’s nothing we can do to save her.”

And if that degree of immersion demands a committed lead, Dominik is adamant that *Blonde* has one in *No Time To Die* scene-stealer de Armas. “She’s unbelievably good, dude. I cast her because she looks like Monroe and she’s confident, a competent actress. I tested her. But when I got her there [*on-set*] – dude, woah. Amazing. If you can explain it to her, she can do anything. She can just get it. Almost instantly. I’ve never seen anything like it.” Given his previous form with actors, expect fireworks. **KEVIN HARLEY**





**You talkin' to me?**

Yes I am, and very glad to. I'm a big *Total Film* fan. As a kid I read it a lot, and any time I was lucky enough to be involved in something featured in the magazine it was very exciting.

Do you have an 'off' switch?

I've been working on it! Especially on set, I've been trying to make sure that when my switch is off, so to speak, I'm making good use of my time, reading or listening to something informative. Previously I've found myself nervously foot-tapping or staring into space, which doesn't make for the most relaxed transition back into shooting.

Who's the more foolish, the fool or the fool who follows him?

I want to say the fool who wrangles all the foolish followers, because they clearly possess a certain amount of power and influence and they know what they're doing; you don't have to look too far, particularly in the world of politics, to find some good examples of that.

How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?

There's a sequence in *The Score* that's one of the most fun fights I've ever done. The way our director Malachi [*Smyth*] times it all to music is kind of genius. It was a real laugh; even rehearsing it I got the giggles. I've always loved learning those skills – but I think it was Mike Tyson who said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face."

What will you be drinking, sir?

My drink of choice is probably tequila. I love a Banderito tequila on the rocks, maybe with orange peel. I don't know whether that's an authentic way to have it, but that's the way I nervously order it.

Have you ever danced with the Devil in the pale moonlight?

Oh my gosh, yeah. Not knowingly, because I try to avoid dancing at all costs. I need to have had several tequilas to even attempt dancing. If I can hide behind a character I'll dance. I felt totally at ease dancing with Naomi [Ackie] in *The Score*.

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS.
FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.



IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH... WILL POULTER

We were dancing in a – totally grounded – boat at one point, which was super fun.

So what are you afraid of?

Heights are a big thing for me. I'm also not the most confident driver. It took me a few takes on *The Score* just doing one high-speed reverse.

What's your favourite scary movie?

Get Out. I just absolutely loved it. I think Jordan Peele's brilliant and that film had so much to offer, embracing so many genres while being a horror in the classic sense of the word.

If I say to you, "Don't think about elephants," what do you think about?

Will Poulter stars as Troy in *The Score*, here alongside Naomi Ackie who plays Gloria.

[Laughs] Yeah, I've got one of those brains that instantly thinks about elephants. I'd say that food occupies my thoughts about 97 per cent of the time. On holiday I'll discuss what we should have for dinner while we're eating lunch.

Is life always this hard, or is it just when you're a kid?

First of all, what a film, and what an actor Natalie Portman is. I think life's especially hard when you're a kid, because growing up without a clue what the adult world looks like gave rise, for me, to anxieties that I wouldn't be able to cope with until I got older. I find myself still struggling to be an adult. But the things you enjoyed and loved as a kid, you shouldn't entirely let go of those in adulthood.

'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do ya, punk?

Very. Especially when I think back to the first job I ever got when I was 12, *Son Of Rambow*. That was a very, very lucky situation, and having a family who have supported me so much ever since makes me a very lucky punk indeed.

Do you have a mixtape coming out?

The Score is the closest thing I have to a mixtape, because I'm involved in several tracks. Recording those songs with Naomi [Ackie] and Johnny [Flynn] was one of the most fun periods of my life. It was a lovely introduction to the world of musicals; I would jump at the opportunity [to do more].

Are you a rusher or a dragger?

I don't know if I fully understand the terms. But I'm impatient and I get restless pretty easily. So on that basis, I'm gravitating towards rusher.

This has been the best day of my life...

The best day of mine? That's a big one. Not sure I can pinpoint one, but those days when I'm with my family, wherever that is, and whenever that presents itself as an opportunity. That's when I'm happiest. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

THE SCORE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 SEPTEMBER.

QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM: TAXI DRIVER, DEADPOOL, STAR WARS: EPISODE IV - A NEW HOPE, FIGHT CLUB, THE SHINING, BATMAN, GREY, SCREAM, INCEPTION, LEON, DIRTY HARRY, BLACK PANTHER, WHIPLASH, SON OF RAMBOW

Colin Farrell and Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja play Jake and adopted daughter Mika.



EXCLUSIVE

BEING HUMAN

AFTER YANG Kogonada returns with the most understated sci-fi movie of the year.

He can be in the biggest film ever and then the camera catches his eyes and you feel there's a whole world in there," says Kogonada of Colin Farrell, who shows a new side of himself as Jake – thoughtful and tender – in the writer-director's sophomore feature, *After Yang*. "So much of what's happening is happening inside Jake. The movement is significant yet subtle."

Landing five years after Kogonada's sublime walk-and-talk relationship drama *Columbus*, *After Yang* is a science-fiction story set in the near future and exploring inner space. It focuses on a family consisting of dad Jake, mum Kyra (Jodie Turner-Smith), adopted daughter Mika (Malea Emma Tjandrawidjaja) and 'techno-sapien' Yang (Justin H. Min). When Yang malfunctions, Jake sets about getting him fixed, a journey that takes him towards understanding his own inner workings as much as the android's.

"Colin and I are both fathers, and the experience of having children was profound for both of us," Kogonada says, explaining how Farrell 'got' the script. "Many people in the modern world struggle with feeling disconnected, and Colin understood the interior journey. Jake and Kyra's marriage is in crisis, and then there's

reconnection; in trying to fix Yang, Yang is fixing him."

Based on *Saying Goodbye To Yang*, a short story by Alexander Weinstein, *After Yang* is coded with themes of memory, identity and what it is to be human. As in a lot of speculative fiction that ponders artificial intelligence, it's by examining the consciousness of a robot that we can better understand ourselves.

"All art is a mirror to us," explains Kogonada. "The minute human beings create any representation of humans and reality, we are projecting an artifice that reflects our sense of being in the world. I think AI is some kind of culmination to that art, that began with statues and sculpture. A being that's not human but has all the qualities of humanity allows you to explore what that means."

When Yang's memories are downloaded, secrets are quietly



Farrell, Jodie Turner-Smith, Tjandrawidjaja and Justin H. Min pose for a family portrait.

revealed. It could have been played as a thriller, but Kogonada prefers "the spaces between the drama".

He smiles. "Yang is on and he has been turned off. Anything in this world that is on, whether it's a pet or whatever, there is the spectre of being turned off. It's existential. That's why we collect things that are important – while we're on, we collect these experiences, and some feel worthy while others are in the background. The human memories in the film are echoing and changing. Yang's objective memories are the same when they're repeated, over and over."

Fittingly, *After Yang* is a film you'll want to watch again and again.

JAMIE GRAHAM

'Many people in the modern world struggle with feeling disconnected'
KOGONADA

AFTER YANG IS IN CINEMAS AND ON SKY CINEMA FROM 22 SEPTEMBER.



Freida Pinto and Sope Dirisu's Selina and Jeremy try their best to mask their intentions.

EXCLUSIVE



Sope Dirisu

How did you get involved?

They approached me with the short film. I was like, "Wait. This is a period drama, in which I, as a Black man, will get to play a romantic lead with nuance and have a full arc? Yeah, I'll do it." It's not the genre which I get the most offers. Historically speaking, the global majority of people have not been represented in films like this. So to get the opportunity to tell that story, I definitely wanted to be part of it.

How did you all bond off screen?

We shot the feature during the pandemic. We were encouraged not to see each other outside of working hours to prevent the spread of Covid. We shot in Ireland while it was quite strictly locked down. So I'm really grateful for a scene partner like Freida, because we weren't able to go for coffees. She was so wonderfully easy to work with.

What does the film say about love?

One of the things I love most about the film is that it's not just about the love between Malcolm and Selina or Julia and Henry, but also the love between friends [and] the love between Malcolm and his mother. The tendrils of love move throughout the film. That's a really nice and wholesome exploration as opposed to it just being focused on the main love story. **ANN LEE**

STANDARDS OF LIVING

MR. MALCOLM'S LIST Sope Dirisu searches for the perfect match in a playful period romance.

Call it a period romcom – I don't know if that's an official genre," says director Emma Holly Jones of her debut feature *Mr. Malcolm's List*. It may be a Regency era romance – full to the brim with corsets and restrained passion – but it wasn't Jane Austen she looked back to. "I rewatched *Four Weddings And A Funeral*, *Notting Hill* and *When Harry Met Sally*."

Gangs Of London star Sope Dirisu plays the Mr. Darcy-esque figure of Jeremy Malcolm, a man so meticulous in his quest for love that he has come up with a strict checklist of attributes he wants his perfect bride to have.

When he very publicly dumps Julia (Zawe Ashton), a young woman he is courting, she becomes hell-bent on revenge, roping in her old school friend Selina (Freida Pinto) to help her. Captain Henry Ossory (Theo James) forms the final cog of this scintillating love square.

Mr. Malcolm's List originally started out as a short film directed by Holly Jones and featuring Dirisu and Pinto, based on author Suzanne Allain's script. The director was inspired after watching Lin-Manuel Miranda's groundbreaking musical *Hamilton* and was keen to shake up the period romance world with a more diverse cast.

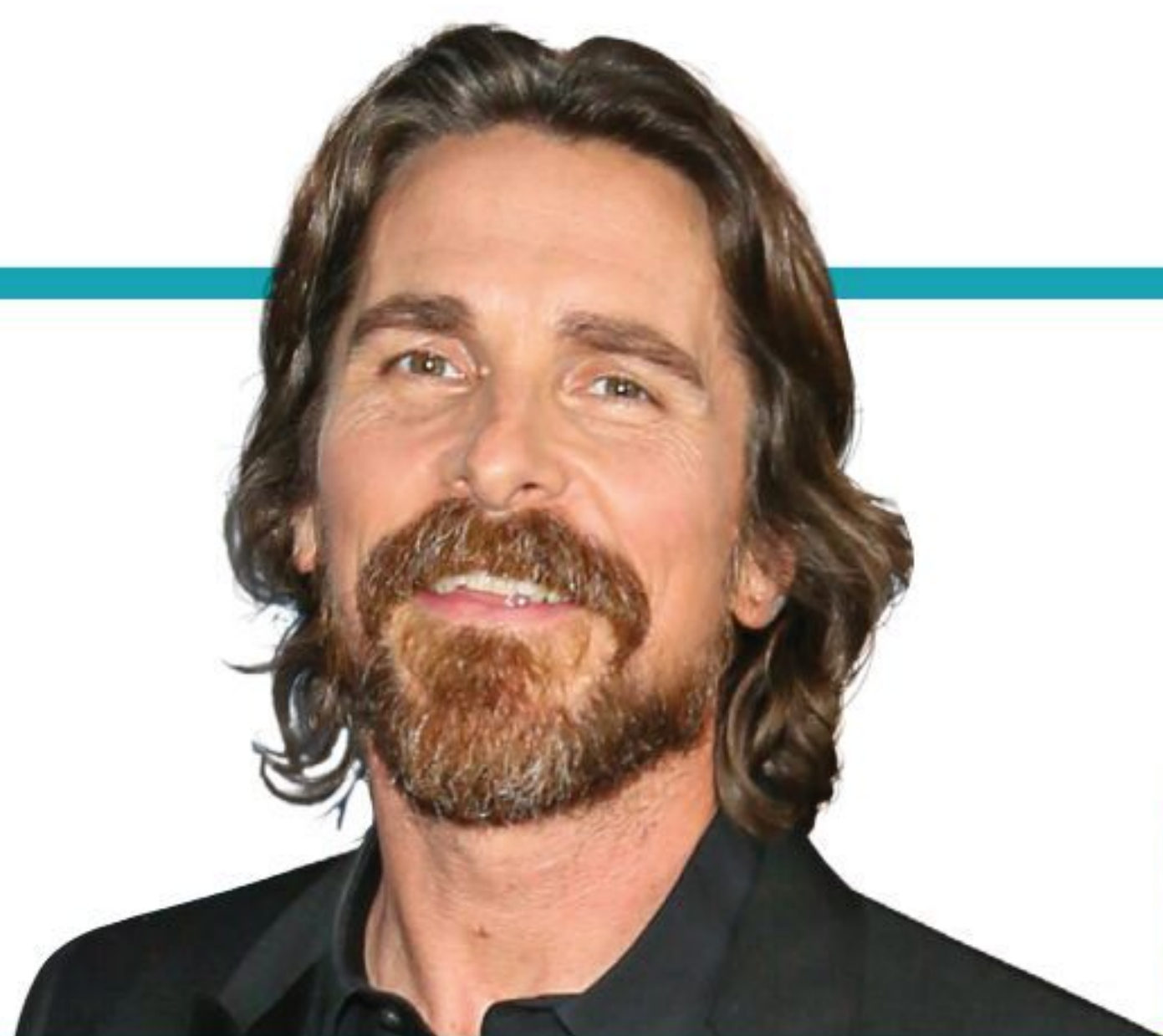
"It's an imaginative space," says Ashton, addressing any potential quibbles about historical accuracy. "It's like someone saying in a sci-fi, 'Well, that's not what aliens look like.' You don't know that, do you?"

Dirisu and Pinto both jumped at the chance to reprise their roles, with the *Slumdog Millionaire* actress describing it as a "no brainer". "Emma had a very unique vision for what she wanted to do," she says. While James was attracted to the film's knowing humour. "I love the wink in its eye."

And it's the film's raucous laughs that will ultimately charm and seduce cinemagoers too. "If you need cheering up, *Mr. Malcolm's List* is like a really good cup of tea," says Holly Jones. "With everything going on in the world right now, it's nice to be entertained with a piece of work by people whose intention was to make you smile." **ANN LEE**

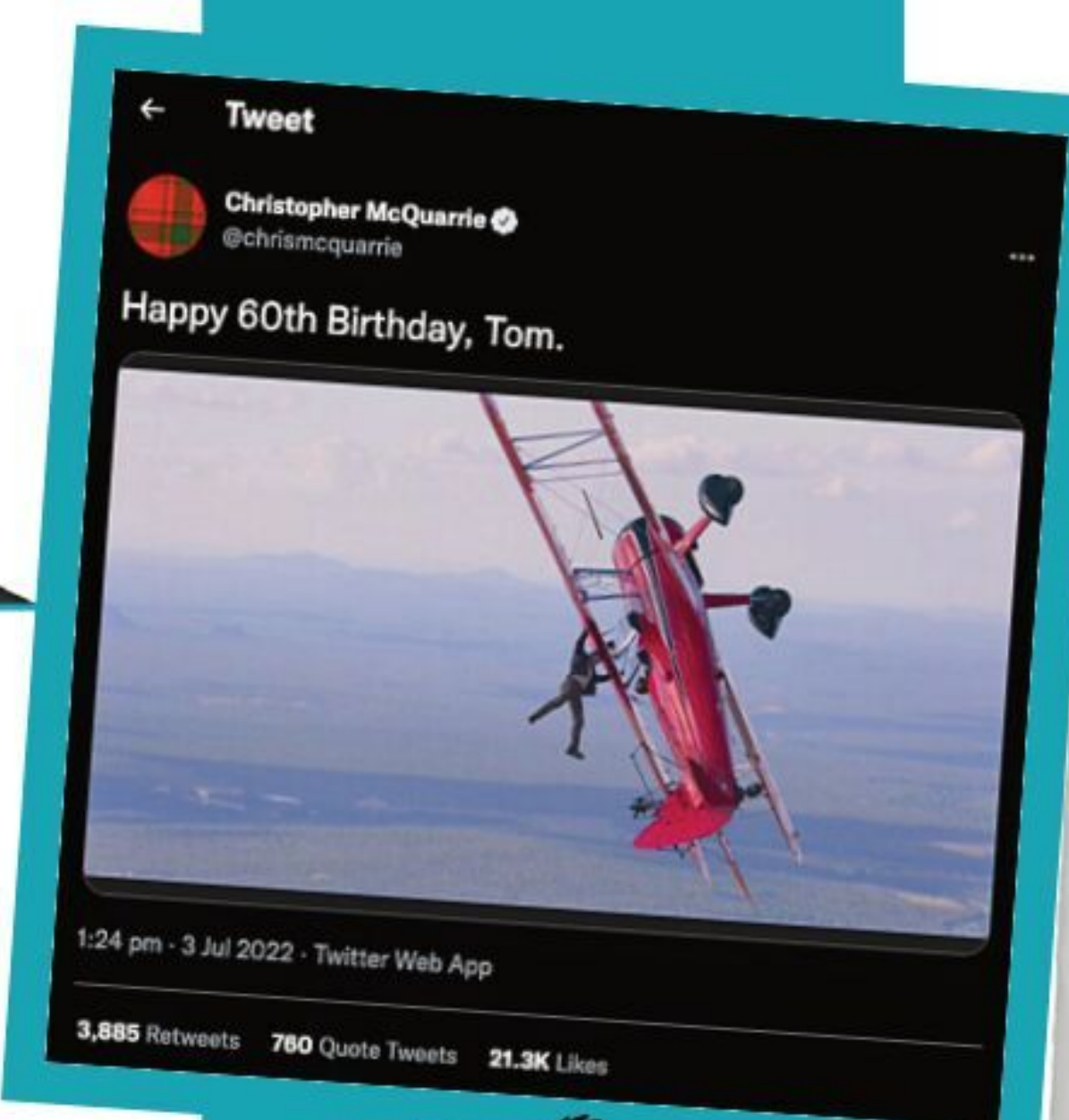
MR MALCOLM'S LIST
OPENS IN CINEMAS
ON 26 AUGUST.





"IF CHRIS NOLAN EVER SAID TO HIMSELF, 'YOU KNOW WHAT, I'VE GOT ANOTHER STORY TO TELL,' AND IF HE WISHED TO TELL THAT STORY WITH ME, I'D BE IN."

CHRISTIAN BALE WOULD RETURN AS BATMAN, BUT ONLY WITH NOLAN AT THE HELM.



"Look, it was great for our careers. But it was weird. So, so weird."

DAKOTA JOHNSON HAS NO REGRETS OVER STARRING IN THE 50 SHADES FILMS.

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THE COST OF THE EYE-WATERINGLY EXPENSIVE **KAIBURR CRYSTAL COCKTAIL** AT THE DISNEY WISH CRUISE SHIP'S HYPERSPACE LOUNGE. FOR THAT, IT BETTER COME WITH A WORKING LIGHTSABER...

"I WAS LIKE, 'CAN I PLEASE HAVE THAT UNDERWEAR?'"

EVA MENDES (AKA, RYAN GOSLING'S WIFE) RESPONDED IN THE ONLY SANE WAY AFTER SEEING THAT IN-CHARACTER KEN SHOT.



LIGHTS, CAMERON, ACTION!

Cameron Diaz is emerging from retirement for a new Netflix film called *Back In Action*, which she'll feature in alongside her *Annie* co-star Jamie Foxx.



GOOD THING



BAD THING



TIME TO KILL

Filming is "at least" two years away on the next Bond film, with no actor currently lined up to play the next 007, according to Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson.



"IT'S A WONDERFUL STORY. IT JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY CONNECTION TO THE TOY."

OG BUZZ **TIM ALLEN** WEIGHS IN ON LIGHTYEAR.

"I UNDERSTOOD ANAKIN'S FEELINGS TOWARDS SAND, BUT MAYBE IT WAS A BIT OF AN ODD TIME TO BRING IT UP, AS HE'S FLIRTING WITH THIS GIRL WHO HE HAS SO MUCH AFFECTION FOR."

HAYDEN CHRISTENSEN ON ANAKIN'S INFAMOUS CHAT-UP LINE.



THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE SCI-FI AND FANTASY MAGAZINE

The magazine cover features a dark, atmospheric background with a greenish tint. In the center, a Predator with a glowing red eye and a Native American woman with long dark hair and a feathered headdress are shown. The Predator is holding a spear. The woman is looking back over her shoulder. The title 'SFX' is in large, white, stylized letters with a vertical line pattern. Above it, 'SHE-HULK' is in green, and 'IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN!' is in white. Below the title, 'PREY' is in large, white, stylized letters, and 'THE PREDATOR IS BACK... IN TIME!' is in green. The cover also includes several article teasers in green and white text, a price tag, and a date label.

SHE-HULK IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN!

SFX

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Nana Mensah stars in, writes and directs *Queen Of Glory*.



EXCLUSIVE

BY THE BOOK

QUEEN OF GLORY A grieving woman inherits a Christian bookstore in a deft indie debut.

Nana Mensah, the writer, director and star of *Queen Of Glory*, is aware of how a brief plot summary of her film – a young woman with a complicated love life inherits a Christian bookshop – might sound like schmaltzy fare, rather than the witty and moving dark comedy it is. On hearing *Teasers* compare the premise to a Hallmark movie, Mensah laughs, “It could have been! If left to my base instincts.” Instead the acclaimed indie is more complex, with an expert balancing of tone. “Really dramatic things happen and comedic things happen just on the other side; I wanted to stay in that space.”

The literal space that her character Sarah inherits is a distinctly drab store with fluorescent lighting and a single staff member played by the statuesque Meeko, a kind sage with a face covered in tattoos (“He’s lived a very colourful life!”). That authenticity was key, but also born of convenience. “It was my aunt’s bookshop. It’s next door to a Mexican restaurant that blares music and an African DVD shop, a real Bronx community.” The shop becomes key to the grieving process, and a monument to her mother. “Death is so unbelievably finite, but her learning to love the store is like having a channel to love her mother again.”

Many of the details of *Queen Of Glory* come from Mensah’s lived

experience, even if the story’s broader strokes are fictional. “My mother is alive, my dad and I have a great relationship, but the emotional truth of it was autobiographical,” Mensah says. “Just feeling a little bit split, like a lot of children of immigrants do.” Sarah, who is in a relationship with a married man, also has to confront her latent “daddy issues” when her father reappears from Ghana. Mensah wanted to look at “what happens when the African patriarch leaves Africa, [to live] as a foreigner in a foreign land, and where does his power reside?”

Best known as an actress, Mensah felt the need to create the sort of stories she wasn’t being cast in. “I was inspired by Lena Dunham and Issa Rae

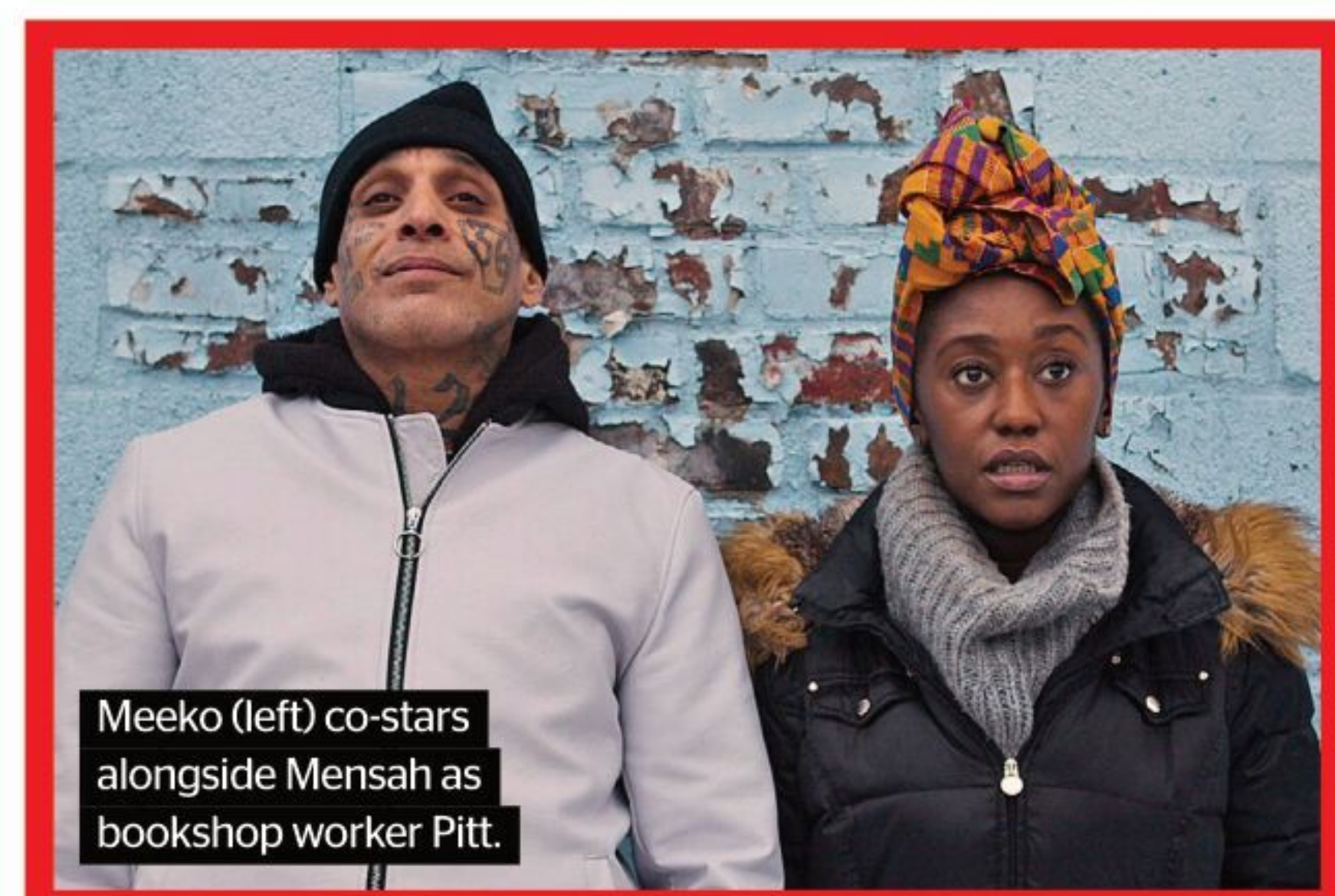
‘The overarching mantra was to have the camera be the steady hand in the midst of madness’
NANA MENSAB

to take charge,” Mensah says. Though she initially had no plans to direct, the further into the process she got, the clearer it became that she should be the one in the director’s chair.

“The overarching mantra was to have the camera be the steady hand in the midst of madness, and then the chaos is coming in and out of the frame. I knew I wanted to do that pretty early on,” Mensah says. “In conversations, I realised it *could* end up being a Hallmark movie, or a despairing Black pain kind of thing. I didn’t want to compromise my own vision of what I had written.”

LEILA LATIF

QUEEN OF GLORY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 AUGUST.



Meeko (left) co-stars alongside Mensah as bookshop worker Pitt.

BOHEMIA MEDIA



Annes Elwy and Nia Roberts co-star in Welsh horror *The Feast*.

EXCLUSIVE

LAST SUPPER

THE FEAST A rare Welsh-language horror film, with plenty of bite...

This is highbrow for Monday morning,” director Lee Haven Jones tells *Teasers*. “But I think it was Brecht who said that to be universal, you have to be local first. This is very much a film in that vein.” The film in question is *The Feast*, the TV veteran’s Welsh-language debut feature, which he describes as “an eco-folk horror”.

The Feast has many surprises worth hiding, but the basic setup is a privileged family gathering at their rural Wales home for a dinner party. Also present is hired help Cadi (Annes Elwy), a quiet young woman who appears on the grounds almost out of thin air. As the day progresses, those assembled each experience various terrors.

“Welsh culture is rich in horrific stories,” says Haven Jones. “If you look at the first existing literature we have in the Welsh language, the Mabinogion, it’s inherently horrific. We looked at those myths and focused on Blodeuwedd, a woman made of flowers. This spirit of nature is bitter and vengeful. The roots of Cadi are in that myth.”

‘Welsh culture is rich in horrific stories’
LEE HAVEN JONES

Haven Jones and Elwy reportedly discussed Scarlett Johansson in *Under The Skin* as a reference for her mesmerising puppet-master performance, and *The Feast* similarly embraces abstraction. “It’s about the viewer projecting their own thoughts and baggage onto that character,” he explains. “The journey of [The Feast] is one from forensically observed naturalism to something far more grotesque, theatrical and Grand Guignol. I’ve spent lots of time as a director and actor swimming in a soup of naturalism. I wanted to get away from that.” Rest assured, the eventual grotesquery is pure nightmare stuff: “Some of the maggots were real, some were basmati rice.” **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

THE FEAST OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 AUGUST.

SHORT CUTS The latest happenings in movieland...

BACK BUSTIN’

Heavily hinted at by the first film’s post-credits scene, but now confirmed – a *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* sequel will arrive in December 2023. Codenamed *Firehouse*, the follow-up is set to return to the iconic fire station, no doubt with spooks in tow.



BEAR WITNESS

Rejoice! A *Paddington* threequel has finally been announced, with Dougal Wilson making his feature debut after helming several John Lewis Christmas ads. The title – *Paddington In Peru* – implies Padd’s may be popping home to see his beloved Aunt Lucy.

SPICE INVADERS

Much news on the *Dune: Part Two* front, with production under way in Budapest as we speak. First the film has gone back by a month to November 2023, and second Léa Seydoux has joined the stacked cast as the Bene Gesserit sister Lady Margot.



THE WIZARD OF OZ

Hot on the heels of *Elvis*, Baz Luhrmann’s next project will be to rework his maligned 2008 film *Australia* into a six-episode series called *Faraway Downs*, inserting excised footage, a new ending and new music. It’ll debut on Disney+ later this year.

NEXT BIG THING

ALIA BHATT IS GOING GLOBAL...

A superstar of Indian cinema, Alia Bhatt has already featured in two of the country's biggest hits this year (*RRR*, *Gangubai Kathiawadi*) and is soon to add a third in *Brahmāstra Part One: Shiva* – the first film in a planned trilogy blending super-heroics and Indian mythology. After that, Bhatt makes her English-language debut in Gal Gadot spy story *Heart Of Stone*. Or as she puts it, “I’m making my debut all over again.”

Brahmāstra has been a long time coming. When did you shoot your first scene?

In February [2018]! It was a huge endeavour for Indian cinema as it's never been done before, this sort of vision. It's a very intense journey. The stakes are really high. The situations they're dealing with are extraordinary.

Did working at that scale take some getting used to?

I have to say, initially, it was really disorientating because it was just all bluescreen everywhere! But I need to go to work and not have something easy to do. If it's easy, then I'm bored out of my head and I want to go home.

RRR has been a surprise hit on Netflix...

It's doing so well in America in its original language, or in the Hindi language. It's amazing, that it's totally connecting. That's what we hope to do with a film like *Brahmāstra*, because it has a potential to connect purely on the basis of its originality and the soul of the story.

How did *Heart Of Stone* come about?

I read the script and I just loved the character. I loved that it was headlined by Gal Gadot, who's such an inspiring female star, and she's trying to do this ambitious project by creating her own action franchise. I've wanted to tick that box for some time now – making my English-language debut. It's a rare opportunity, because you get to reinvent yourself and start a new story.

JORDAN FARLEY

**BRAHMĀSTRA PART ONE: SHIVA OPENS
IN CINEMAS ON 2 SEPTEMBER.**

SHUTTERSTOCK

EXCLUSIVE

ROAR MATERIAL

BEAST Big 'Dris enters the lion's den...

They cut through all the crap, and the social games we play, and show who we are," says Baltasar Kormákur. The Icelandic filmmaker behind *Adrift* and *Everest* is telling *Teasers* why survival stories continue to grip his psyche with the force of a lion's jaw. "And if someone asks me to go to Africa and work there, I'm like, 'Yeah, that sounds pretty good!'"

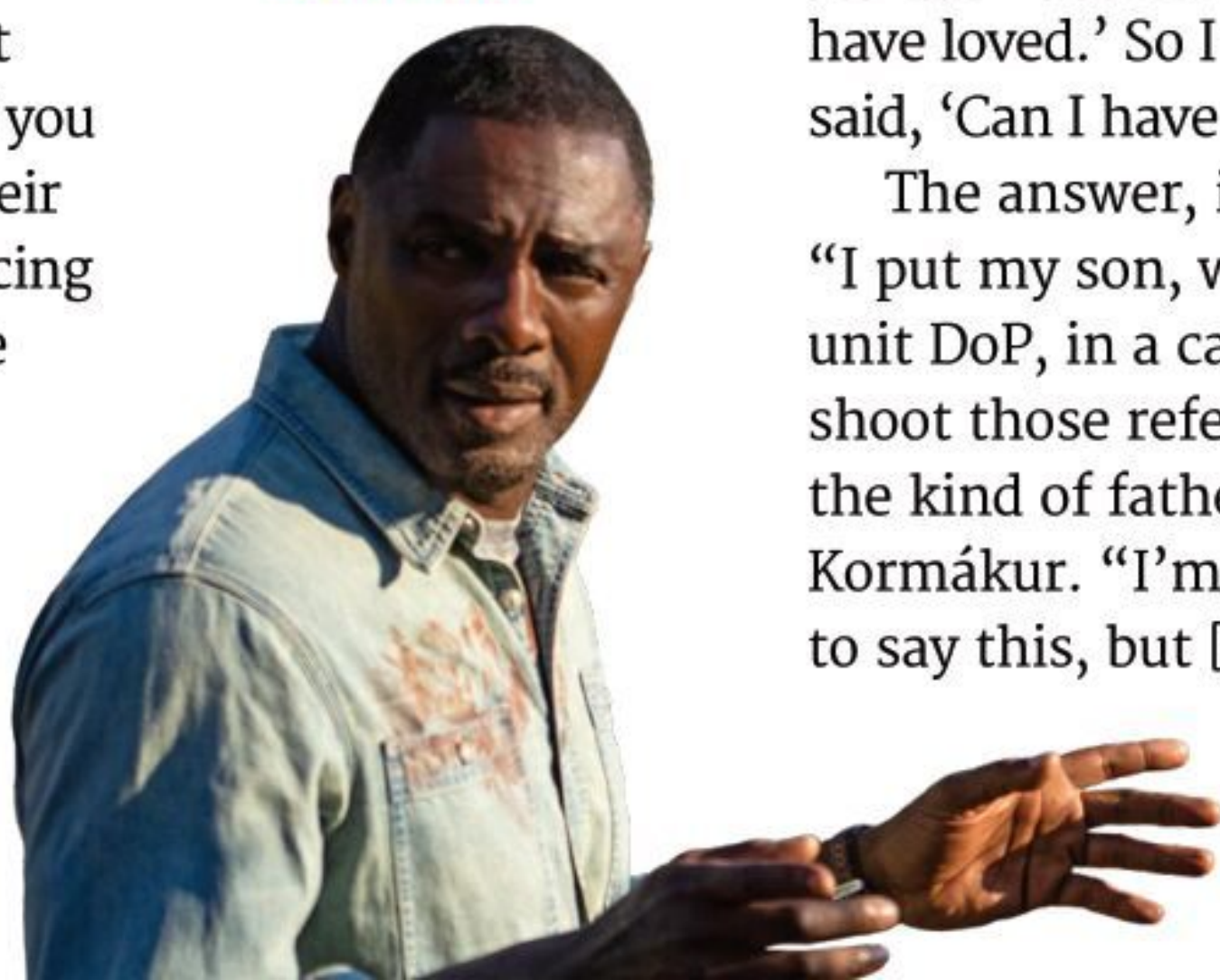
Operating in a new biome for *Beast* – a film in which Idris Elba's doctor dad and his teenage daughters are stalked across the Savanna by a rogue lion with a murderous grudge – Kormákur shot in Limpopo and the Northern Cape, where cast and crew were "surrounded by lions and elephants", according to the daredevil filmmaker. "When the studio comes to me, they know I'm not going to shoot this in Atlanta on a soundstage."

Pitched to Kormákur as a sci-fi monster movie featuring a genetically modified lion the size of a "small garbage truck", the filmmaker's first instinct was to bring the story down to earth. "I was like, 'I'm doing the version where it physically functions like a real lion because, to me, that is dangerous,'" nods Kormákur. "It's scarier because it's a real threat. Lions attack people more than sharks, it just doesn't reach western media."

The problem, of course, is that you can't shoot with a real lion if you want your cast to emerge with their limbs still attached. After convincing the money-men to "invest in the best CGI available", Kormákur called a filmmaker with Oscar-winning experience in digital animal attacks.



'I went to the studio and said, "Can I have a lion on set?"'
BALTASAR KORMÁKUR



"I had a call with [director Alejandro González] Iñárritu, because I love the bear attack in *The Revenant*," Kormákur says. "The one thing he said to me was: 'If you get a lion to be onsite – to use for reference, like how the light falls onto the fur – that's the only thing I would have loved.' So I went to the studio and said, 'Can I have a lion on set?'"

The answer, improbably, was 'yes'. "I put my son, who's the second unit DoP, in a cage [with the lion], to shoot those reference scenes. That's the kind of father I am," chuckles Kormákur. "I'm not sure I'm allowed to say this, but [the lion] got out at

one point, and there was a little bit of panic on set!"

Thankfully, neither human nor beast was harmed, but just as important to Kormákur was that his film not harm the reputation of the king of the jungle. "Yes, we should be afraid of them. But at the same time they're also incredibly beautiful," Kormákur notes. "We should respect them and protect them, and not back them into a corner where they become aggressive." **JORDAN FARLEY**

BEAST OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 26 AUGUST.



Emma Thompson's fat-suited Miss Trunchbull: OK for art or regressive stereotyping?

CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

BODY AUGMENTATION

AS EMMA THOMPSON COMES UNDER FIRE FOR MATILDA, PERHAPS WE SHOULD WE RECONSIDER 'FAT SUITS'.



JANE CROWTHER
@TOTALFILM_JANE

When the new *Matilda* trailer was released with great fanfare, there was a backlash from women who were, once again, seeing a grotesque female meanie being portrayed by a slim actress in a fat suit.

Why, the internet argued, couldn't the ghastly head teacher Miss Trunchbull (described in Roald Dahl's books as a former Olympian who is 'a gigantic holy terror') be portrayed by an athletic actor or the opportunity given to an actual plus-size thesp? Why must women whose bodies do not conform to a Hollywood ideal be vilified via a trope of heavier women being the butt of jokes, a visual signifier of an unpleasant character?

The business sense of casting Thompson is undeniable – she is an accomplished actor and a marquee name. But having just done the media rounds on *Leo Grande* talking about

'FAT SUITS ARE OFTEN DEPLOYED IN FEMALE ROLES TO COMEDIC/CRUEL EFFECT'

accepting her body in her first nude role and starving herself to fit a studio ideal of womanhood in her fledgling years, this could be seen as a misstep. For an industry trying to improve its representation of diversity on the screen, seeing Thompson in prosthetic jowls and corpulent body augmentation to depict the moral failings of a tyrannical antagonist seems something of an own goal.

And before we start arguing that this sort of outcry suggests that only actors with the exact physical attributes of their character should play the role (where was the commotion over Colin Farrell suiting up for *The Batman*

or Austin Butler getting Dad bod padding for *Elvis*?), we should consider that fat suits are often deployed in female roles to comedic/cruel effect that tells audiences curvaceous women are shameful (Monica's embarrassing plus-size past in *Friends* or *Shallow Hal*'s one-gag tale of a man oblivious that his girlfriend is obese), jolly (Bridget Jones' misadventures in too-small clothes suggest she must be fallible because of her weight) or punchlines. Rarely has an actor poured themselves into padding to play a sexually alluring, heroic or morally impressive woman. Name one. I'll wait...

Evan Sarah Paulson, who wore a suit to play Linda Tripp in *Impeachment: An American Crime Story*, feels conflicted about the practice, as she told *The LA Times* last year: "There's a lot of controversy around actors and fat suits, and I think that controversy is a legitimate one. I think fatphobia is real. I think to pretend otherwise causes further harm." Especially worth considering in a children's film, no?

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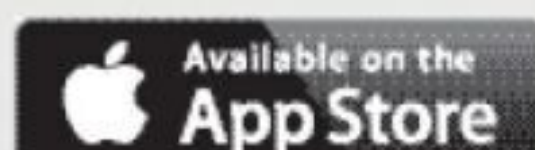
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EXCLUSIVE

SUSPICIOUS MIND

THE SUSPECT Aidan Turner plays a shift psychologist with a hero complex in a new thriller...

What is *The Suspect* about?

Peter Berry (writer): Joe O'Loughlin is a successful clinical psychologist, he loves his wife and daughter, has a social media profile and publishing deal... Life couldn't get any better, and then it does: he rescues someone on a very narrow ledge, 10 floors up, and becomes a national hero. When he gets involved in helping the police with profiling murder suspects, they realise Joe probably knows more than he's letting on regarding a particular case.

Why did you want Aidan Turner for the role?

PB: I wanted the audience to be on Joe's side. Aidan is handsome and charismatic, with a voice that you could listen to all day long, but he can turn so sharply that you think, 'There's something really dark about this guy.'

Aidan Turner: I've played lots of characters with a huge moral drive. Joe felt complicated and different: everything seems to be going so well for him, but he's only one step away

from unravelling. He has recently been diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's and becomes a bit more reckless – but is it because of the diagnosis, or is that an excuse? He makes some mistakes, lies and gets caught and, while you're horrified, you sort of understand why he might do what he does. Plus there was definitely a push from my side to do something more contemporary.

Which themes leapt out to you?

AT: I love how he's introduced as a hero, then you get the context and his behaviour becomes more questionable. Figuring out how to play that through the different aspects of his life – detective Joe, patient Joe, family man Joe – has been really enjoyable, leaning into the genre while keeping it authentic.

PB: I was very lucky about 20 years ago when I was one of the 15 per cent that survive something, so I understood that desire to take charge and take risks, because they're your risks. I was

'Aidan is handsome and charismatic, but he can turn so sharply'
PETER BERRY

intrigued by the idea of someone who is used to going into the layers of other people, having to examine himself.

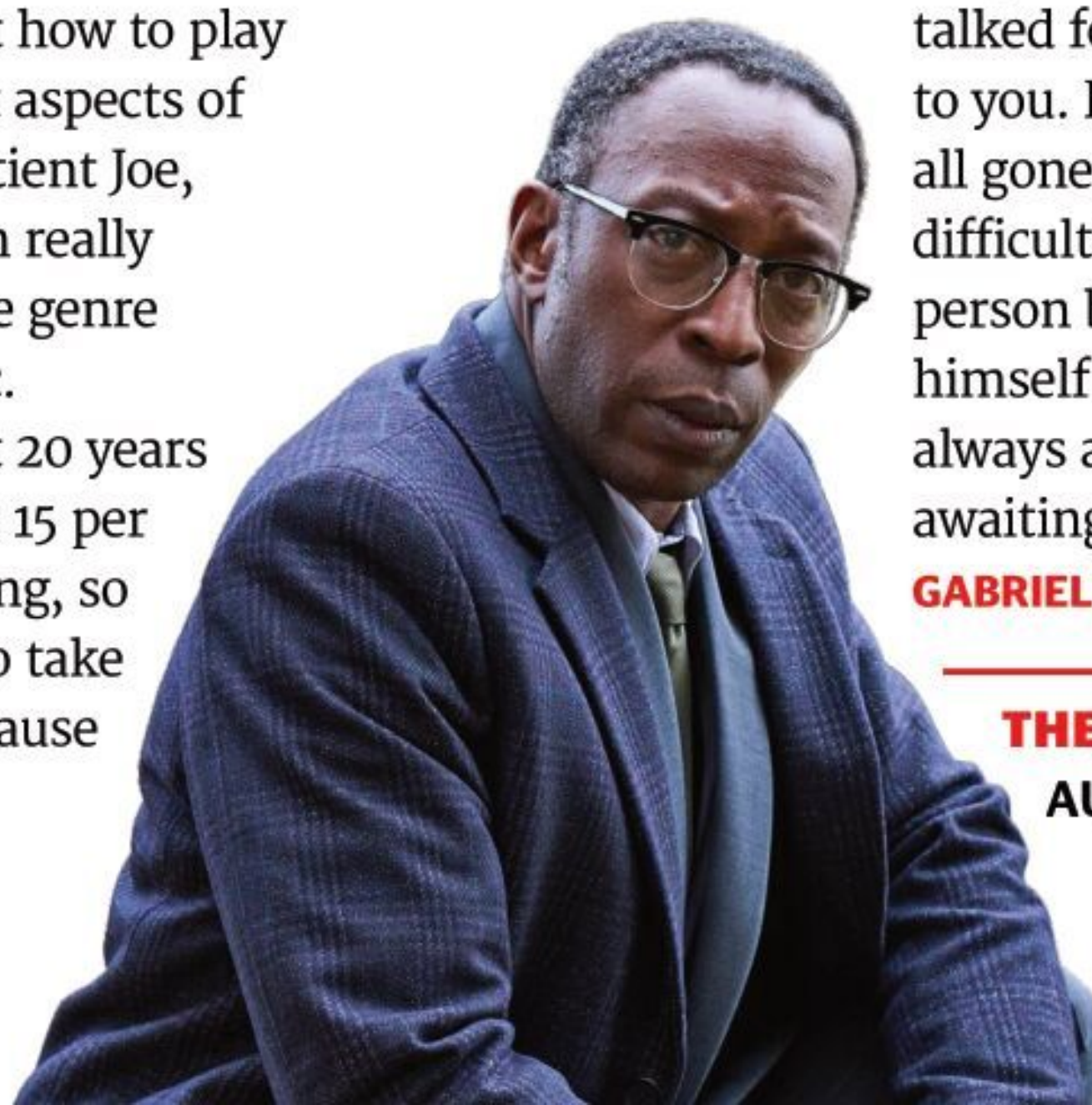
What was the biggest challenge of filming?

PB: TV audiences are really, really smart. You can't get anything past them – my first drama was in 1991 doing a Ruth Rendell mystery when we had two policemen leaning on a gate, discussing the plot. That wouldn't fly these days! Here, there are not that many suspects, so you have to make viewers invest in all the characters without hoodwinking them.

AT: Apart from filming that opening scene on the ledge – because I'm not great with heights! – getting the illness right. I met a musician called Drew Hallam, about my age, who was diagnosed less than a decade ago. We talked for hours about what that does to you. He plays guitar, and that's all gone. Support groups were really difficult because he'd be the youngest person by 30 years. He didn't trust himself holding his own baby. He was always around to call or text – I'll be awaiting his review pretty anxiously!

GABRIEL TATE

THE SUSPECT COMES OUT LATE AUGUST ON ITV AND ITV HUB.



EXCLUSIVE

CRIME TEAM

SEE HOW THEY RUN Saoirse Ronan and Sam Rockwell are a pair of 1950s coppers investigating a theatreland murder...

It's a murder mystery and it's a comedy, but at its heart, it's a story about a partnership," says director Tom George of his debut feature, *See How They Run*. A spry, witty caper set in 1950s Theatreland, London, the film boasts the kind of enviable ensemble associated with the genre.

At the heart of the case are two chalk-and-cheese bobbies, played by Sam Rockwell and Saoirse Ronan. "On the one hand, you've got Constable Stalker, played by Saoirse, who's incredibly enthusiastic, dedicated, and has really good instincts actually, but a habit of jumping to conclusions, and getting ahead of herself a little bit," says George. "And on the other hand, you've got [Inspector] Stoppard, played by Sam, who's world-weary at times. It seems like he's barely interested in solving the case. But he's methodical and cautious in his approach. And he's obviously lost some of the necessary enthusiasm for police work. So it's kind of obvious from the top that they could be a great partnership."

Beyond that central pairing, there's a cracking cast filling out this story of a Hollywood film director who's murdered as he starts work on adapting a play. "You've got people from two different backgrounds in some ways," says George of his ensemble. "You've got these big-screen stars like Saoirse and Sam and Ruth [Wilson] and David Oyelowo and Adrien Brody, and then alongside that, some of my British comedy heroes like Tim Key and Charlie Cooper and Sian Clifford and Reece Shearsmith. And yet they, I think, really feel like an ensemble that's working together."

Movies have been extremely meta

'See How They Run is a thriller and a murder mystery and a comedy in its own right'
TOM GEORGE

again this year (*Scream*, *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent*, *Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers*) and *See How They Run* continues that trend, with George playing with form as he did on Bafta-winning TV mockumentary series *This Country*. "From my first reading of Mark's [Chappell] script, it was clear already that that tension was in play here because *See How They Run* is a thriller and a murder mystery and a comedy in its own right. But in some ways, it's all about murder mysteries as well."

Of course, even back in Agatha Christie's day, there was scope for expansion, with the central sleuths going on to solve more mysteries in future books. While George says it wasn't his ambition to build a franchise, in an early meeting with studio Searchlight Pictures, he told them, "Whether or not there are subsequent films or other cases for Stalker and Stoppard to work on together, you should feel like you want those by the end of the film. That's the nature of this partnership forming. Whether you get those stories or not, it was always really important to me that you should feel like you want more of that." **MATT MAYTUM**

SEE HOW THEY RUN
OPENS IN CINEMAS
ON 9 SEPTEMBER.



The cast of *See How They Run* knows how to dress up for a proper murder mystery.





Saoirse Ronan and Sam Rockwell's *Stalker* and *Stoppard* combine cop-work and comedy.



Reece Shearsmith, Ruth Wilson and David Oyelowo add to the stacked cast.



DISNEY/SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

Isabelle Fuhrman – now 25 – returns to play a younger version of murderous Esther.

EXCLUSIVE

NOT THAT INNOCENT

ORPHAN: FIRST KILL An even younger Esther inveigles her way into another unsuspecting family.

When the first *Orphan* film premiered in 2009 it delighted audiences with a fantastically creepy performance from 12-year-old Isabelle Fuhrman and a totally unhinged twist. In the final act it is revealed (spoiler alert) that Esther, the adopted child, is actually a 33-year-old woman with dwarfism and murderous tendencies. Despite its healthy box office, the scope to build a franchise was limited by Esther meeting her demise at the end.

Now, over a decade later, *Orphan* is back for prequel *First Kill*, where we see Esther wreaking more havoc, with original star Fuhrman plus seasoned horror director William Brent Bell. The cat was out of the bag when it came to Esther's identity, but Bell tells *Teasers* that another huge twist was essential. "Reading the script I thought it's gonna be hard to live up to the first one but even knowing something was coming, I was floored," he smiles. Fans of the original may not just be surprised by the twists but also by the fact that they may find themselves rooting for Esther. "She's had a tough life!" Bell laughs, "Even if she's done awful things she becomes the hero of the movie."

Fuhrman is now in her twenties and initially was not expected to return,

but Bell was pleasantly surprised that "she was really excited about the prospect". Key was that her face hadn't changed. "I look totally different when I was 25 to 12, but she looked so similar that it could work," Bell says.

Despite a youthful face, getting an adult to read on the screen as nine years old involved ingenuity and some old-fashioned movie magic. "We had three body doubles and everything from her wardrobe had to be sized up, but also fit her adult body like a child," Bell explains. "Anytime adults were around her the camera would be at an angle to force the perspective. Tricks that have been done in Hollywood movies forever. Whether it be the size of her fork or putting her co-stars on a platform – it's a really



William Brent Bell jumps into the director's chair.

'There's the unknown of what's going on in a child's mind'
WILLIAM BRENT BELL

fun challenge."

There's also the challenge of making such a small figure feel like a legitimate threat. But Bell, who has form with little terrors, including *The Boy's* bone-chilling doll, finds a particular potency in innocent-seeming objects as sources of evil. "It's an interesting psychology," Bell says. "There are children who grow up and are not really scared of dolls and clowns. Then as adults we're far more scared of them. There's the unknown of what's going on in a child's mind. Like Damien in *The Omen* – a sweet little child who didn't really speak the whole movie but he, like Esther, is terrifying." **LEILA LATIF**

ORPHAN: FIRST KILL OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 AUGUST.

BETWEEN TAKES

GUGU MBATHA-RAW

THE SURFACE STAR TALKS PAINTING AND POWER-NAPS.



What's the first thing you do when you arrive on set?

Usually, when I arrive in my trailer, I put the kettle on [laughs]. I maybe light a scented candle and figure out my playlist for the morning. If I've got extra time, I'll roll out my yoga mat. But usually, things are run with military precision.

What do you take on set with you?

I always have music with me. It depends on the vibe of the set, and the vibe of the role, and what's required. Sometimes you want to tune into something for a scene, and sometimes you want to tune out all the hectic moving around and the crew energy.

Hot or cold lunch?

Always hot, for sure. It depends on the catering, and also where I am. I was just filming in Belfast, and it was really cold some of the time. So sometimes I'd order rum to warm me up on the freezing sets. But then we were also filming in Italy for three weeks – in Venice, and in Trieste and places by the sea where you've got to have the catch of the day.

Do you ever sleep on set?

Oh, God, no. I wish I could. I feel like it's such a skill. I just worked with Kevin Hart who's a master power-napper, and is able to go back to a trailer and just zonk out for like 20 minutes. I sometimes try, and put my legs up the wall, and do a yoga restful pose. And I try to at least lie down. But I very rarely get to a deep sleep. I might get to just nodding off, and someone's knocking on the door.

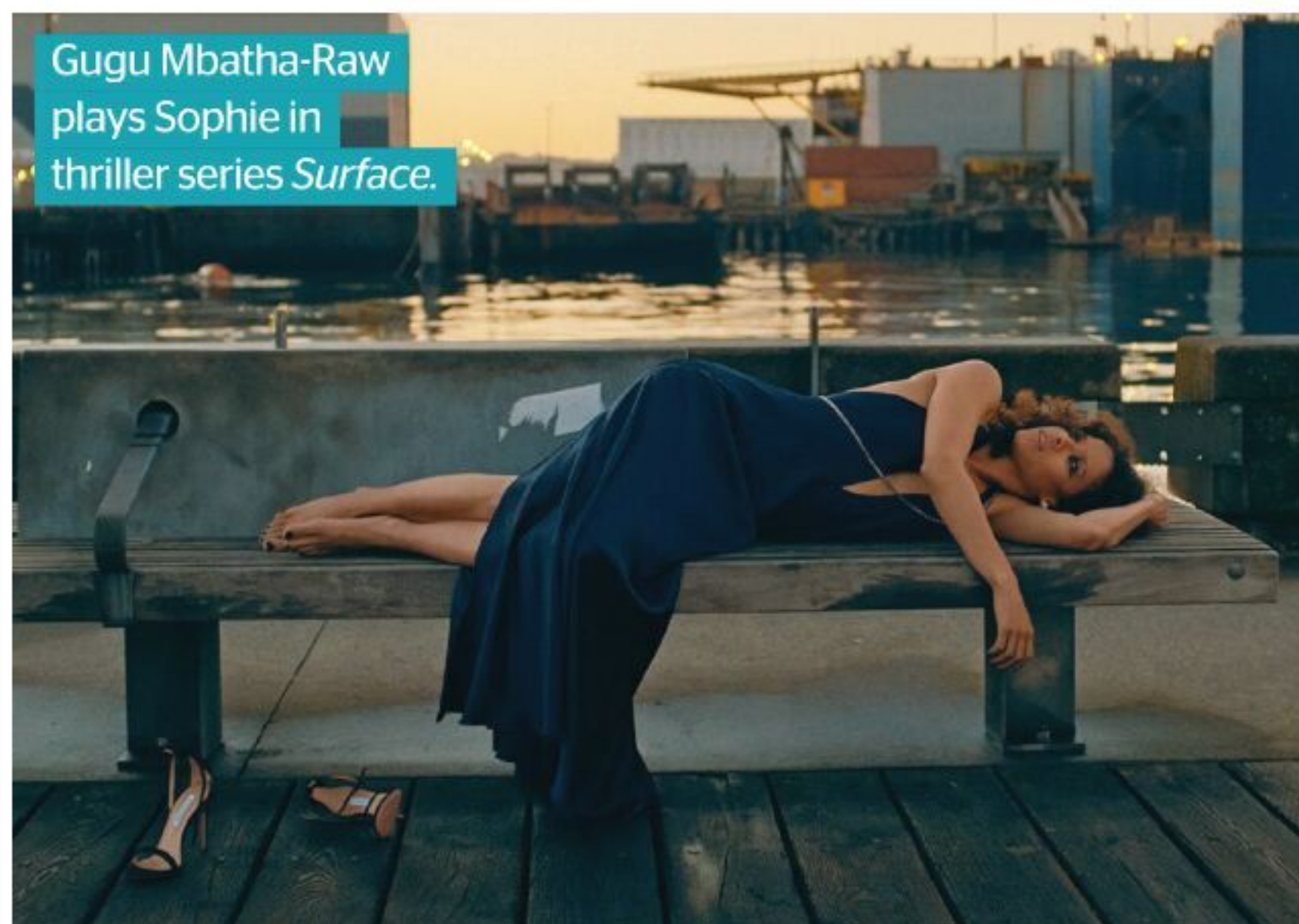
Best on-set experience?

Working on *Surface* was one of my best on-set experiences, because it's such an amazing story and role. I was also an executive producer for the first time. To be a part of the process from such an early stage was incredible. Going to Vancouver and it being the summer – it's such a beautiful place to be. And with amazing castmates like Oliver Jackson-Cohen and Marianne Jean-Baptiste and Stephan James. Everyone really bonded.



'ONE OF MY FIRST JOBS IN AMERICA, I THINK I DID SOMETHING LIKE 19 HOURS ON THE SAME DAY'

Gugu Mbatha-Raw plays Sophie in thriller series *Surface*.



And the worst on-set experience?

I wouldn't say it was a bad experience, but I would say it was a challenging experience, some of the underwater scenes that we have in *Surface*. I was learning to do breath holds, and working with free divers. But I really enjoy stunts. And another great thing that I got to work on, on *Surface*, which I'd love to do more of, was horse riding, and getting to work with the amazing horse stunt team. So I've got my eye on a western next, maybe. We'll see.

What's the longest day you've ever spent on set?

It's probably not legal! I remember, one of my first jobs in America, I think I did something like 19 hours on the same day where we were filming. And then I also had to do some publicity, some breakfast show. I was kind of delirious. That was pretty bonkers. I don't even know if that's allowed any more.

Most memorable end-of-shoot gift?

It's at the top of my brain because it was two days ago – I painted a portrait of Kevin Hart as a wrap gift. I've been painting a lot more since the pandemic, and have done a lot of portraits. The one I did of George Floyd was auctioned for charity. And because our film is actually about an art heist, and it's all about art, that was a fun gift, because he developed an interest in art during the shoot.

What's the best wrap party you've ever been to?

It seems like they've been outlawed since the pandemic. It's so boring. I haven't been to one for ages. I had a really fun time at the wrap party for *The Morning Show* a couple of years ago. Because my character had quite a sad and intense journey, I was just really happy to see everyone again. That's probably the last wrap party I went to, pre-pandemic. It was so nice to see everyone and all my castmates, and just be in a joyful spirit! **MATT MAYTUM**

SURFACE PREMIERES ON APPLE TV+ ON 29 JULY.

IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A FILM JOURNALIST

Editor-at-Large **JAMIE GRAHAM** lifts the lid on film journalism.

On Friday, a new cinema, *The Light*, opened in Banbury, and I was literally the first patron through its doors. I moved to Banbury just over a year ago and I've since watched this canalside venue inch closer and closer to fruition, with two proposed opening dates coming and then going before it finally opened for business... 20 minutes late because the staff were still diligently making it beautiful as hard-hatted men exited the building.

I stood outside waiting, concerned the delay would impact my double bill of the midday showing of *Jurassic World Dominion* followed by the 3pm of *Downton Abbey: A New Era*. But I was in at 11.48, receiving a royal welcome (well, beaming hellos and a free coffee) before plonking myself in a luxurious reclining seat in time for the first advert. And as

I slurped at my free beverage, my mind turned back to being 14 in my hometown of Melksham, Wiltshire, where Craig, the dude at the local video store, always put aside the best new horror and action films (many of them with 18 certificates) for me to see on the day they came out. So why, I pondered as I drained my latte, did I always need to be the first in line?

EARLY BIRD

Is it as simple as passion, my love for movies meaning I need to Hoover everything up immediately? I hope so, though the line between passion and obsession is a thin one, and I'm all too aware of how my addictive personality can get me into trouble, having been sober for 14 years. Or is it something more unsavoury? Am I like a gluttonous seagull in *Finding Nemo* crying, "Mine! Mine! Mine!" as I gulp down films? (Sidenote: my wife always has to stop me

THIS MONTH...
THE THIRST TO BE FIRST

'THE LINE BETWEEN PASSION AND OBSESSION IS A THIN ONE'

from leading the migration to the buffet at parties.) Being the first to see something can feel like a badge of honour, or make you feel important – the first of which is a little pathetic and the second rather boastful, if you stop to think about it.

I honestly don't know. Maybe I'm being hard on myself, for I certainly don't regard fans who queue up for midnight screenings of a movie on the day it comes out in such an unforgiving light. I admire their dedication, their fervour. And besides, 99 per cent of movies do their best business on their opening weekend, meaning there are clearly a lot of hungry seagulls out there, desperate to feast on films while they're fresh and flapping.

ATTENTION SEEKER

In my case, I also think one of the great joys of being a film journalist is the opportunity to act as a tastemaker. If one presumes that critics can make a difference (too

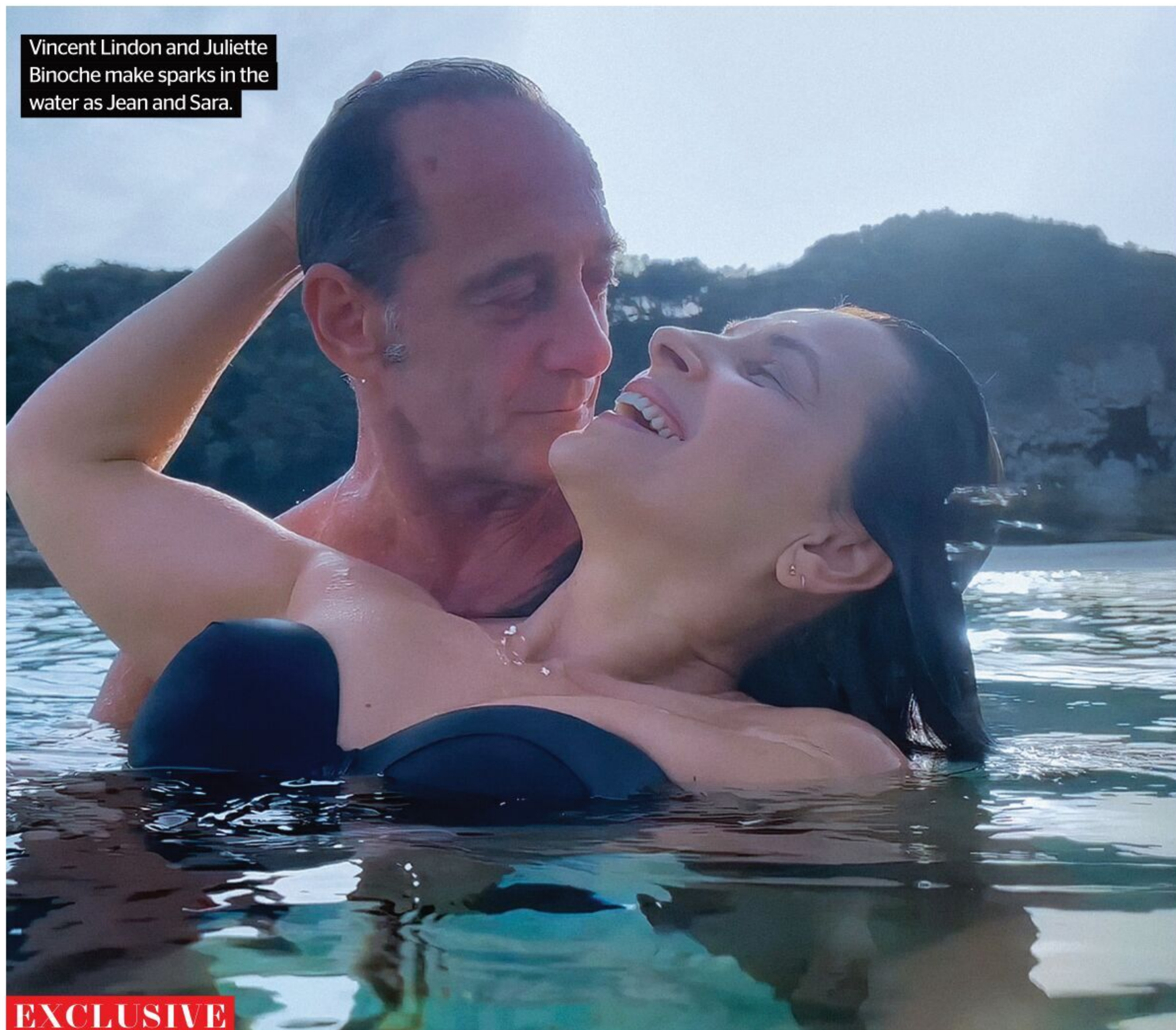
big a topic to tackle here!), then there are few things more exciting than alerting people to a great movie they might otherwise miss. Tom Stourton, the writer and lead actor of Brit cringe-com *All My Friends Hate Me*, yesterday tweeted me thanks for bigging up his small movie ("It means the world"), and Jake Gyllenhaal still mentions my five-star review of *Donnie Darko* 20 years on; after flopping in the States, *Donnie* found its tribe in the UK, with *Total Film* leading the way by crowning it our Film Of The Year.

Of course, I could beat myself up over that, too – the need to feel seen, and to serve some sort of purpose – but those are desires that all us humans share. Don't we? I think so. And you want to know another thing we all share? A fierce loathing of spoilers, which is perhaps the most convincing reason of all for why it's good to get in quick. "Mine! Mine! Mine!" I cry, before others chew it up and spit it out with all its entrails on show.



JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE... FOR MORE MISADVENTURES, FOLLOW: @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON TWITTER.

Vincent Lindon and Juliette Binoche make sparks in the water as Jean and Sara.



Vincent Lindon

What did you make of Jean when you read the script?

Very, very strong, like a sailor man. He is very nice. Absolutely not cynical. No perversity. He's like a big piece of wood. He doesn't move in front of the wind. And he supports a lot of things. And I like people that you can say of them, "That's my story. And I'm sticking to it."

This is your first time acting with Juliette Binoche. How was it?

It's like a big final in tennis. I'm not speaking about talent, please, because I am modest. But it's a metaphor. It's like Borg and McEnroe – one is playing at the end of the court, the other one is playing at the net. But we're not the same. She needs a lot of calm. And I need to be on the set and joke with all the crew.

After this film, *Titane* and heading the Cannes jury, it's been a good year for you, hasn't it?

Yes, but I'm always afraid when a year is a good time. Because it's always good to know that it's a year that's coming. And not a year that you're leaving. So now, I'm waiting for next year and then the year after. But now it's good!

JAMES MOTTRAM

EXCLUSIVE

LOVERS ON THE ROCKS

BOTH SIDES OF THE BLADE Claire Denis' latest is not – repeat, not – a love triangle...

Me? Love triangle. It's an expression I detest," spits Claire Denis (*High Life*), when *Teasers* addresses the theme of her new movie, *Both Sides Of The Blade*. "It's a funny way to speak about what is so painful in life. Me, I would never use something like that. That's the kind of thing you can read in magazines, but it's not in life."

Consider *Teasers* well and scolded. Still, *Both Sides Of The Blade*, which won Denis the Best Director prize at this year's Berlin Film Festival, does feature the story of a married couple, Jean (Vincent Lindon) and Sara (Juliette Binoche). Then there's Jean's friend François (Grégoire Colin), Sara's ex-lover – who is suddenly back in the couple's lives after years apart. Uh-oh.

The film pairs Denis with French novelist Christine Angot, who previously worked with her on the director's 2017 film *Let The Sunshine In*, which cast Binoche as an artist embroiled in various love affairs. While Denis, 76, is 14 years older than Angot, they're clearly simpatico. "At a certain age you have experienced many things about love, and you know what you feel

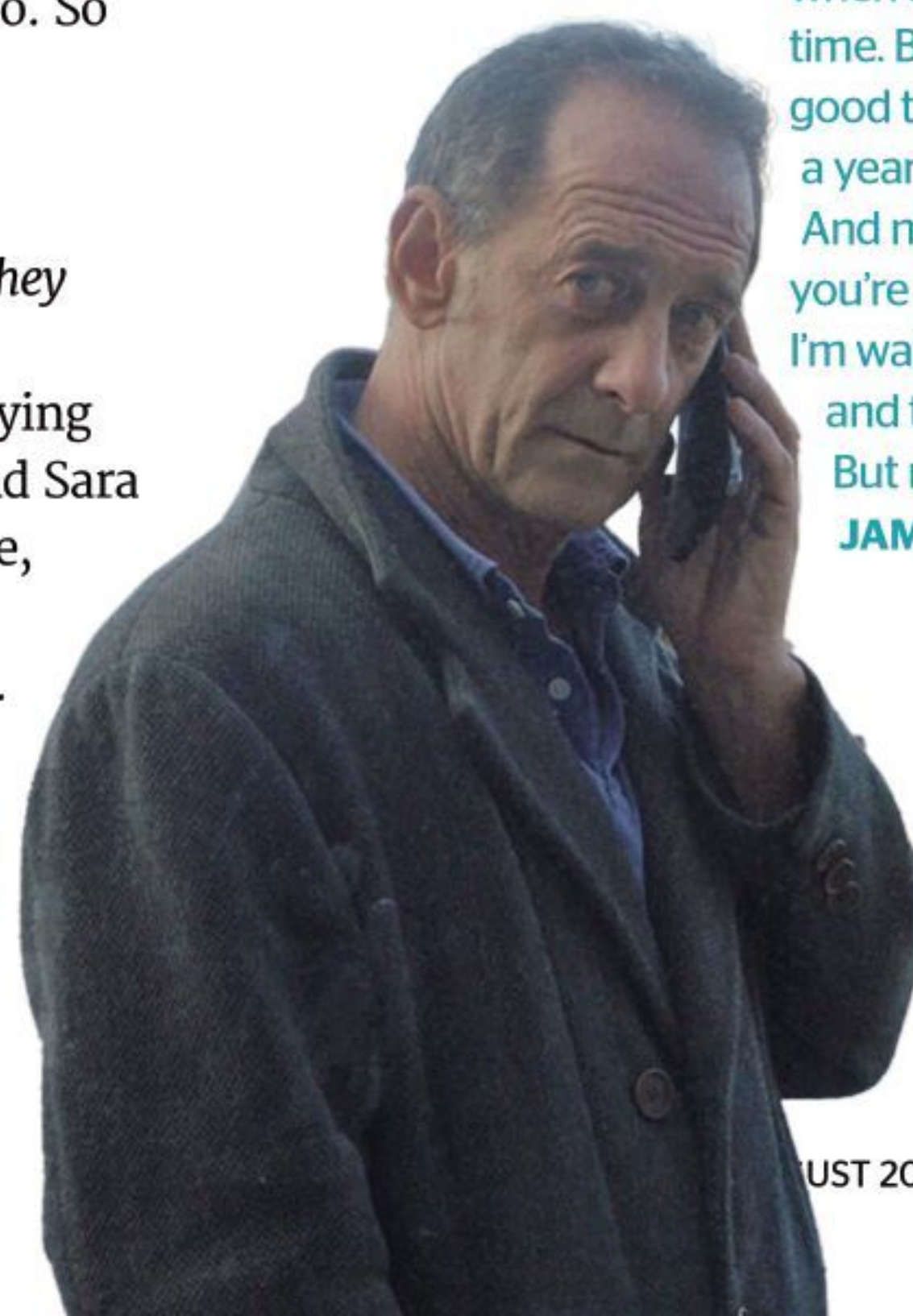
and what you felt and what it could be," the director shrugs.

What the film manages very well is showing these middle-aged lovers without recourse to airbrushing or using body doubles. "But they are beautiful! I did it only because they are beautiful," exclaims Denis. "I mean, I would hate to show the damage on their body of age. The fact is that Juliette is free with her body. Completely free. Vincent too. Grégoire too. So it was possible through them."

So coming back to the central theme – if *Both Sides Of The Blade* is not a love triangle story, then what is it? "I think [*they are*] normal human people," answers an exasperated Denis. "Maybe François is trying to get a bit of a revenge. But I see Jean and Sara are fighting with their own desire. For me, there is no 'bad' in my films. Passionate relations bring you to extreme situations. It's not bad. It's being human, I guess."

JAMES MOTTRAM

BOTH SIDES OF THE BLADE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 SEPTEMBER.



Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor play Laal and Rupa - this film's version of Jenny.



EXCLUSIVE

FORREST RENEWAL

LAAL SINGH CHADDHA | Life is like... a golgappa in the Hindi remake of Forrest Gump.

It was an adaptation that really surprised me," Aamir Khan tells *Teasers*. The celebrated filmmaker has variously been dubbed the "James Cameron of India" – for the fact that five of his films have topped the country's all-time box-office chart, including current champ *Dangal* – and his industry's Tom Hanks, for his range as an actor. The latter comparison is particularly apt as Khan's latest film, *Laal Singh Chaddha*, is a remake of '94 awards darling *Forrest Gump*.

It's been over 12 years in the making. Khan started chasing the rights when prolific Indian actor Atul Kulkarni handed him the script for a *Gump* remake set in India, written completely on spec. "He's not a writer, and he's written an adaptation of *Forrest Gump* in like 10 days? It felt like a joke," Khan admits. But the funny business ended there. "When I heard the script, suddenly the whole thing came alive in front of me."

Director Advait Chandan (*Secret Superstar*) was Khan's manager at the time, and describes their long road to making *Laal Singh Chaddha* – including a meeting with Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks during the *Bridge Of Spies* shoot in 2015 – like something out of Forrest's whimsical life story. "This film has been a bit like the feather in *Forrest Gump*,"

says Chandan, still in disbelief. "It went all over the place, and kind of fell into my lap. I don't know how, or why!"

Though the original is an American classic, the pair saw in Kulkarni's script the opportunity to "retain the soul" of Robert Zemeckis' Oscar-winner, while putting the story in a new context. "Every social event is obviously Indian," explains Khan, who spent an entire month running across the subcontinent for the film, with an injured knee. "The character is the same, and the essence is the same, but the milieu and where it is set – all that is different."

That means no JFK, no box of chocolates and no bus stop ("In India, you can't have a conversation at a bus stop. It's too noisy and crowded – it just won't happen," Khan chuckles).



There might be no bus stops, but this remake still includes the feather.

'I often think of it like a cover song - with an Indian flavour'
ADVAIT CHANDAN

Instead, Laal regales an enraptured audience on a train, sings (!) and encounters famous Indian figures from the '70s till almost present day. "I often think of it like a cover song," says Chandan. "With an Indian flavour."

Reuniting with his *3 Idiots* co-star Kareena Kapoor as Rupa, the remake's Jenny, it is only now occurring to Khan that his work as Laal will inevitably be compared to one of the most singular character performances of the last 30 years. "I really love the way [Hanks] played it. But I didn't think of the comparison," Khan nods. "I was just doing what I thought Laal was."

JORDAN FARLEY

LAAL SINGH CHADDHA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 12 AUGUST.

THE HERO

Actor/writer Simon Pegg is a global star thanks to his beloved work with director Edgar Wright and recurring Hollywood gigs as Benji and Scotty in, respectively, the *Star Trek* and *Mission: Impossible* franchises. Also an animated ace as one-eyed weasel Buck in the *Ice Age* movies, Pegg is now voicing Bob, a black cat, in Apple TV+ 'toon *Luck*.

You clearly enjoy animation. Did you do voices in the playground?

I did. Once I had a really bad accident – I smashed my face, blood everywhere – and Mr. Skinner was trying to keep me from going into shock by getting me to do funny voices: “What would Margaret Thatcher say about this, Simon?”

How much of your career is down to luck, or is it all talent and work ethic?

I don't believe there's anything other than ourselves determining our destiny. Ultimately it all comes down to the choices you make. It sounds a little arrogant, but I'd say I haven't been lucky; I've been fucking good at my job [laughs].

What's the moment when you've been most amazed this is happening to you?

I have so many. Walking onto the set of *Spaced* with Jess [Hynes, co-writer and co-star] and seeing the flat – we'd written this script and someone had extrapolated a physical 3D environment from it. Sitting with Rik Mayall and Ade Edmondson when I did *Guest House Paradiso* having been a massive fan of *The Young Ones* growing up. Being on the bridge of the Enterprise. Or writing a scene on *The Force Awakens*; I'd written 'Interior – Star



SIMON PEGG

THE BRIT STAR TALKS QT'S STAR TREK AND RE-TEAMING WITH EDGAR WRIGHT...

Destroyer – Day', and I looked up and Mark Hamill was walking onto set. Oh my fucking God!

Do you still get the same buzz?

When you're on set, doing your stuff, it's joyful. And if I've been in my trailer all day on *Mission* and I'm tired and want to go home, I just think, 'What would my 13-year-old self think?' He'd be like, 'What?!!'

What's the latest on the untitled *Star Trek* sequel? We know it will continue the Kelvin timeline...

I know as much as you do. The basic facts are they want to do one, and something's being developed,

and that depends on a script being approved and our availability syncing up so we can all be in it.

Was the Tarantino *Star Trek* ever going to happen?

I think he had a script. Definitely an outline. And he came into [J.J. Abrams' production company] Bad Robot and described his vision to J.J. and everyone got excited. But the only way it would happen is if Quentin directed it and I think he has his own ideas for what he wants to do next. The idea is certainly exciting. I was a bit defensive when people dismissed it as, "It's just going to be *Pulp Fiction* in space." I was like, "No, it will be more than that." And then I saw Quentin and he said, "No, that's exactly what it was gonna be!"

The trailer for the next *Mission: Impossible* film is insane. How do they just keep getting bigger?

Chris McQuarrie is a great combination of technique and passion. There's never a time he's going to half-arse it or wing it. He's got such massive attention to detail. He defies the law of diminishing returns because every time he makes a movie he learns new skills, then he applies those skills to the next movie he makes.

Inevitable final question: will you team up with Edgar again?

He came to stay at my house a few months ago and we talked about what we want to do next. We've had a few ideas. We could make another Cornetto film, but then we'd be accused of creative bankruptcy. Or we could do something completely different and then all the people who want the same thing would attack us. Ultimately we have to do the thing that appeals to us, not what people want to see. I think we're going to try and piss off as many people as we can [laughs]. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

LUCK OPENS IN CINEMAS AND ON APPLE TV+ ON 5 AUGUST.



Pegg has travelled from *Spaced* to space in *Star Trek* and through the zombie apocalypse in *Shaun Of The Dead*.

'WE HAVE TO DO THE THING THAT APPEALS TO US, NOT WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO SEE'

THE
RETURN

RETURN OF THE RINGS

As the line between movies and TV becomes ever more blurred, along comes small-screen epic

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER.

The team behind the most expensive TV show ever made take Total Film on an journey into the outer reaches of Middle-earth, featuring new faces, terrifying Orcs, and Galadriel as you've never seen her before.

And this is only the beginning...

WORDS JACK SHEPHERD





I

n a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit – and a few thousand years before that, there lived a harfoot. While these peoples of diminutive stature may have the same hairy feet and knack for going on unexpected journeys as their more famous ancestors, the Harfoots occupy a very different Middle-earth. Morgoth, the great enemy, has just been defeated and his chief lieutenant, Sauron, gone into hiding. Gil-galad rules the prosperous Elven realm of Lindon, and the Dúnedain, long-living men, keep to themselves on the isle of Númenor. The Dwarves eat well in the lavish, doomed halls of Khazad-dûm, and somewhere in the distance, a nameless shadow is stirring. This is the Second Age of Middle-earth, and the setting of *The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power*, perhaps the most ambitious TV show ever made.

In the years since Peter Jackson's two trilogies, *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Hobbit*, Hollywood has explored how to continue Tolkien's work on screen – no surprise considering the wild successes of imitators such as *Game Of Thrones* and *The Witcher*. A whole host of suitors met with the author's estate, trying to purchase the precious rights to one of mankind's densest stories. Only one prevailed: Jeff Bezos, who put forward enough gold to make a dragon blush (a reported \$250m for the rights, another \$462m for production costs of the first season alone). The deal was done, and then came the question of finding someone – or someones – foolish enough to take on the challenge of writing something so ambitious.

"When we first went up for the job, we were told there were literally dozens of other people throwing their hat into the ring," showrunner J.D. Payne tells *Total Film*. "Amazon bought the rights to the trilogy, the appendices, and *The Hobbit*. They said the field was wide open: 'Any story within that material,



you can go and tell.' You had people pitching the Young Aragon show, or the Gimli spin-off."

But Amazon wanted something more ambitious; something that felt worthy of Tolkien. Payne went to the drawing board – and he was not alone. Helping shoulder this burden was frequent writing partner (and friend since high school) Patrick McKay, the pair having previously worked together on various unproduced scripts for J.J. Abrams' company Bad Robot, including *Star Trek 4*. Together, the showrunners started exploring what an onscreen return to Middle-earth could look like. "We looked at the whole Tolkien mythology, and there was this story," McKay says. "I remember sitting around our then assistant's apartment, and we said, 'Well, here's what the Dwarves are doing, and here's what the

Elves are doing, and here's what the Númenorians are doing.'"

They envisioned a sprawling series told across multiple seasons, each one bigger than the last. "That arc of the major Second Age events felt like such an amazing, untold story," Payne says. They went to Amazon and pitched the idea, and the duo – previously with one public IMDb credit between them – were hired to bring Tolkien's epic back to the screen. And so began their long adventure, the story of which has only just begun.

LEGENDS & MYTHS

Tolkien never truly went into the specifics of what happened during the Second Age, which starts following the demon Morgoth's defeat and concludes 3,441 years later with Isildur cutting the

Owain Arthur is majestically bearded as Prince Durin IV.



BEN ROTHSTEIN/PRIME VIDEO



Morfydd Clark's young Galadriel attends a council led by Benjamin Walker's Gil-galad

One Ring from Sauron's hand, previously portrayed in the prologue to Jackson's adaptation of *The Fellowship Of The Ring*. Tolkien predominantly painted the era with broad strokes; one sentence from the appendixes, for instance, simply reads: "So fell the glory of Númenor." How did this mythical kingdom of man, never before seen on screen, fall into ruin? Book readers who have dived into Tolkien's compendiums have some understanding. For the show's writers, though, there was ample room for their imaginations to run wild. "Tolkien left this trail of breadcrumbs," as McKay puts it. "We see our skills, working with so many amazingly talented artists, to bring that into fruition and excavate the fossil that he left us."

The decision was made for there to be numerous stories all interweaving, with over 20 leading characters filling out the ensemble. Men and Elves and Dwarves and Harfoots are all present. "There are so many worlds that could have been shows of their own, but we wanted to do something that played all the notes on a piano," says McKay. "There are

'EVERY TIME I WAS SHOWN SOMETHING NEW, IT JUST BLEW MY MIND'

MORFYDD CLARK

other fantasy shows that will do one thing really well, where it's this political thing, or it does great magic. In Tolkien, one moment you're hand on heart with Hobbits, and they're being silly and fun and charming. And in the next, it's a deep political drama with intense discussion about the fates of kingdoms."

Some of the characters in *The Rings Of Power* will be familiar: thanks to the everlasting nature of Elves, younger versions of Galadriel and Elrond – previously portrayed by Cate Blanchett and Hugo Weaving – are in the series. Isildur also plays a key role, while the villainous Sauron's presence is keenly felt. "We can say that when he appears, it might be in a way people aren't expecting," teases Payne, keeping his secrets close. In other words, don't expect the same imposing Dark Lord seen in Jackson's two trilogies.

Ah, we should probably talk about those movies. Their spectre looms over the series: Weta Workshop, the special-effects and props company, returns behind the scenes. There are even some of the same actors under heavy prosthetics as Orcs. But don't go into this looking for more of the same. ➤➤



► “We weren’t interested in doing a retread or a prequel,” says Payne. “We were never thinking: ‘Come watch our show because we’ll give you a whole lot more of that.’ We wanted to tell a story that would stand on its own two feet. We’re enormously grateful for the world that Peter [created]. We had a useful conversation where we said, ‘OK, there are these designs. What did Peter’s Elves look like? What did Peter’s Orcs look like?’ There were things we liked, things we didn’t like, things we wanted to build off of, or go in a big direction from. It was always a discussion.”

J.A. Bayona, who last directed the blockbuster *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, and who helms the opening two episodes of *The Rings Of Power*, says that, in his first meetings with the showrunners, they expressed their love

for the Jackson movies. “The bar was set up so high – that was the level we wanted to match,” he says. However, as pre-production continued, the trio began truly separating themselves from what came before. Rather than recapture the same magic, they looked to embody the spirit of Tolkien’s work, and that eventually affected their casting choices. Everyone who joined the series had to match one criteria: they “had to have Middle-earth in them”, says Payne.

“It’s a little ineffable, but that’s what united us all,” Payne says. “All the storylines aspire to have that. If it feels like Middle-earth – like Tolkien – it earns its place in the show.”

Middle-earth may be an ineffable quality, but being a Tolkien fan probably helps, and both Morfydd Clark and Robert Aramayo, the new faces behind

Galadriel and Elrond, know their Gollum from their Gandalf. When *TF* meets the pair – Clark in person, Aramayo over Zoom, both glowing ethereal presences – they discuss being enthralled by Jackson’s movies. Being cast in the series meant a lot to both of them, especially Clark. In fact, you can go online and watch the exact moment she truly realised she had landed the role.

Search for videos from the Toronto premiere of Armando Iannucci’s *The Personal History Of David Copperfield*. You should find an on-stage, post-screening Q&A with the entire cast. It’s about 20 minutes long, but halfway through, Clark mysteriously steps off-stage. Just before the premiere, she had gotten the call. “And then I just passed out in the Q&A,” she says with a laugh, now able to reflect more fondly on the moment. “That’s how I dealt with it!” What’s perhaps more surprising is that Clark hadn’t even been told which character she would be playing. “Morfydd moved to New Zealand without knowing what role she was playing,” says executive producer Lindsey Weber. “We broke the news to her there. It was an incredible moment.”

‘WE WANTED TO TELL A STORY THAT WOULD STAND ON ITS OWN TWO FEET’

J.D. PAYNE

Aramayo’s response to discovering he was in *Lord Of The Rings* was much calmer. “I got in the bath,” he says, Yorkshire accent showing. Meanwhile, Sophia Nomvete, who plays the Dwarven princess Disa, was in a precarious position when her agent rang. “My baby was three days old,” she says, sitting comfortably on a sofa alongside fellow theatre actor Owain Arthur, who portrays her onscreen husband, Durin IV. “My daughter was born with a C-section, so I was immobile. But she was feeding at the time and I just remember laying in bed, saying to my husband ‘Take the baby! Take the baby! The job’s coming!’” She says, with a laugh that fills the room. “Then they told me: ‘You’re playing the first female Dwarf ever to have been seen! By the way, you’ve never really done telly before, either, so this should be fun.’”

Once the fellowship of predominantly UK-based actors was assembled – McKay describes the casting process as finding “22 needles in 22 haystacks” – they headed to New Zealand, where filming was soon delayed due to the Covid pandemic. Clark and Aramayo reminisce about rehearsing together in offices,



The Orcs look very different to the ones seen in Peter Jackson’s movies.

STYLING MIDDLE-EARTH

Make-up team Jane O'Kane and Vinnie Ashton on...

Designing the Elves

O'Kane: For each of the worlds that we created, we had a theme – we wanted to create their own language, and because this is their beginnings, to show that they're not influenced by other races. And the Elves are connected to this spiritual realm. We gave them a real ethereal quality, everything about them was shining and lustrous. The hairline was slightly higher. When we showed off their ears, we really embraced that, rather than putting hair over them. We gave their skin a real lustre. We put metallic threads into their hair, to give shine and shimmering light – the reflection of light and luminosity was big in their world.

Ashton: The ears required a lot more perfection because we had Elves with short hair, Elves with their hair off their face. The ears were all treated so delicately, each one was specifically designed for that performer.

Designing Harfoots

Ashton: Because the Harfoots are pre-Hobbits, they are much more primitive. They live in the land, it's ingrained into their bodies.

O'Kane: Starting from the ground up, they're very earthy, their feet are big and large, and they don't wear shoes, because of their connection to the earth. That's what's quite endearing about them. Their styling was very much based on nature and the environment that they were around. Their hair was all matted from lying in the undergrowth, and they had bits of branches and moss and trees caught within it from months and years of not brushing their hair.

On the scale of the series...

Ashton: Pretty much everybody was wearing some form of prosthetic or wig. Every make-up was very complex and technical. We had to have a really highly skilled team of artists.

O'Kane: We doubled, tripled and quadrupled everything, because a lot of the characters had a scale double, or a stunt double, and then a horse-riding double, and swimming double, and a body double. And so we were doubling, doubling, doubling doubles. It was extensive. **JACK SHEPHERD**

wearing tracksuits and masks. The whole situation felt surreal – like something was missing. And then they went to set.

"Stepping on set in costume for the first time, I just couldn't fathom what they would have created," Clark says. "I find it quite challenging rehearsing in a little office and pretending to be thousands of years old. You need that drama. I thought I was prepared. I thought I knew what I was going to see. And every time I was shown something new, it just blew my mind." Arthur shares a similar sentiment. "I was just blown away every time," he says excitedly. "To see Khazad-dûm, you just go, 'Oh my God, this is incredible.' It felt like there was magic dust sprinkled there."

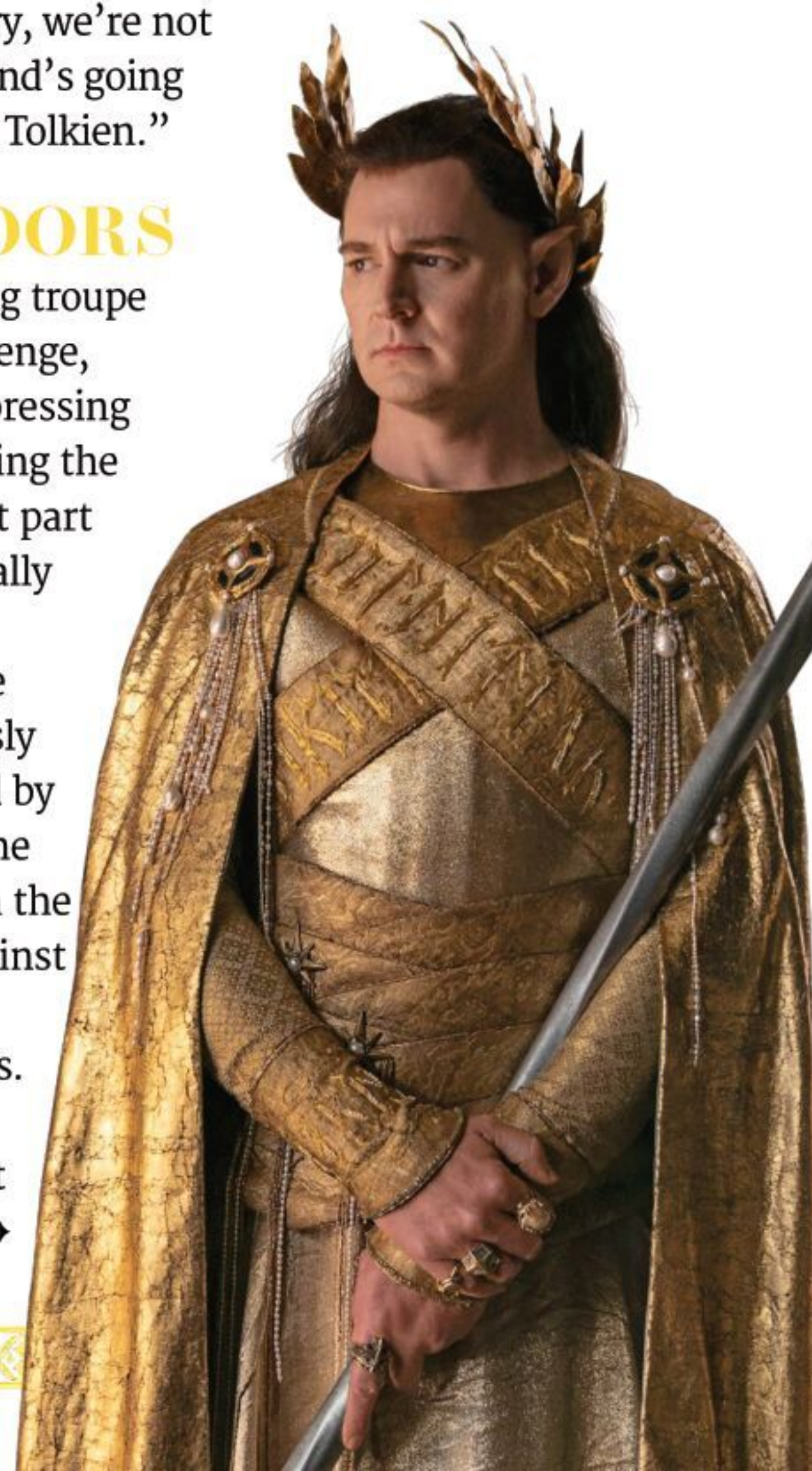
Despite the size of the sets, there's one refrain everyone repeats: that this collective of artists felt like they were creating something just for themselves. "We were playing a very expensive make-believe game when we were in New Zealand," says Clark. Aramayo adds that they had the gift of time – two years preparing their characters. And even when the cameras were rolling, there was still the atmosphere of an independent movie project. Yes, really. Just ask Benjamin Walker, who plays Gil-galad, and who previously portrayed the titular president in the (definitely real) Hollywood production *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*.

"You have this army of technicians and artists and craftsmen – from the

detail on your buttons to the hand-painted leaves," he says. "There is a scale to it. But on the day, it feels like this weird, little band of gypsy artists, shooting a guerrilla independent film, because you're all trying to milk every bit of magic out of every scene. It's much more collaborative than I had anticipated. A lot of times on movies, they say there are no bad questions, but they just want you to shut up. That's not this. J.D. and Patrick are aware that we're creating a world, and that every bit of it matters. And because we have so much time and that luxury, we're not going to waste it. Every second's going to be full. Like every page of Tolkien."

DARKLING DOORS

While finding the right acting troupe may have been its own challenge, there was something more pressing to address. Bayona says finding the show's tone was the trickiest part of the whole process, especially as each race occupies a very different space: the Elves are political, the Harfoots joyously fun, and the humans tainted by romantic melodrama. "All the storylines were coming from the repercussions of the war against Morgoth," he says of what unites these disparate stories. "And every single character, every single race, they face it in a very different way." ➤➤



OWAIN ARTHUR AND SOPHIA NOMVETE

Meet Dwarves Durin IV and Disa...

What's the relationship like between your characters?

Arthur: There's an antithesis to everything with a dwarf, a constant inner battle in them. There's always a "yes... but". There's always a "but" with a dwarf. They love with passion - to the extreme. When they're angry, they're on fire. When they're loving, it's full of passion. And we see that with us.

Nomvete: The brilliant thing with Disa and Durin is: united we stand. We are the prince and princess of Khazad-dûm. It's so great to see the Dwarven kingdom in this time, in their prime, in the position of power.

How long did it take to get into costume and makeup every day?

Arthur: I'm going to jump in to say: three hours.

Nomvete: I always go four hours, 20 minutes.

Arthur: I don't know where you get that extra hour from.

Nomvete: It could be my shower and meditation - and breakfast. I like a slow brekkie in the morning.

Arthur: [laughs] OK. But in terms of actually being sat in the show, I was three. And with a lot of glue. It took about 50 minutes to put the nose on. The beard was in about 15 pieces. The beard can be plaited, or it can be loose, depending on if it's an official visit - then I'll wear it in my glory. But being a practical prince, and one of the lads, a dwarf of the Dwarves, it was tied up practically, and put through a ring, so that it doesn't get in the way of climbing and smashing.

Sophia, your character is the first female dwarf we've seen on screen. Were there ever discussions about her being more masculine-looking?

Nomvete: There were all sorts of lengths discussed with the beard, and brilliantly we decided to go with this beautiful interpretation of facial hair for Disa. There was actually a first draft of her costume, which was much more heavier-set, a little bit more stony and rocky and heavier. A couple of the creative team had this wonderful idea of: 'What if we celebrate Disa's passion and sexuality, and how unapologetic she is about feeling, and loving, and being, and her body, and her strength?' And for everything that I am, and everything that the world does and does not see filmically enough, I was so, so happy and proud and excited to be celebrated.

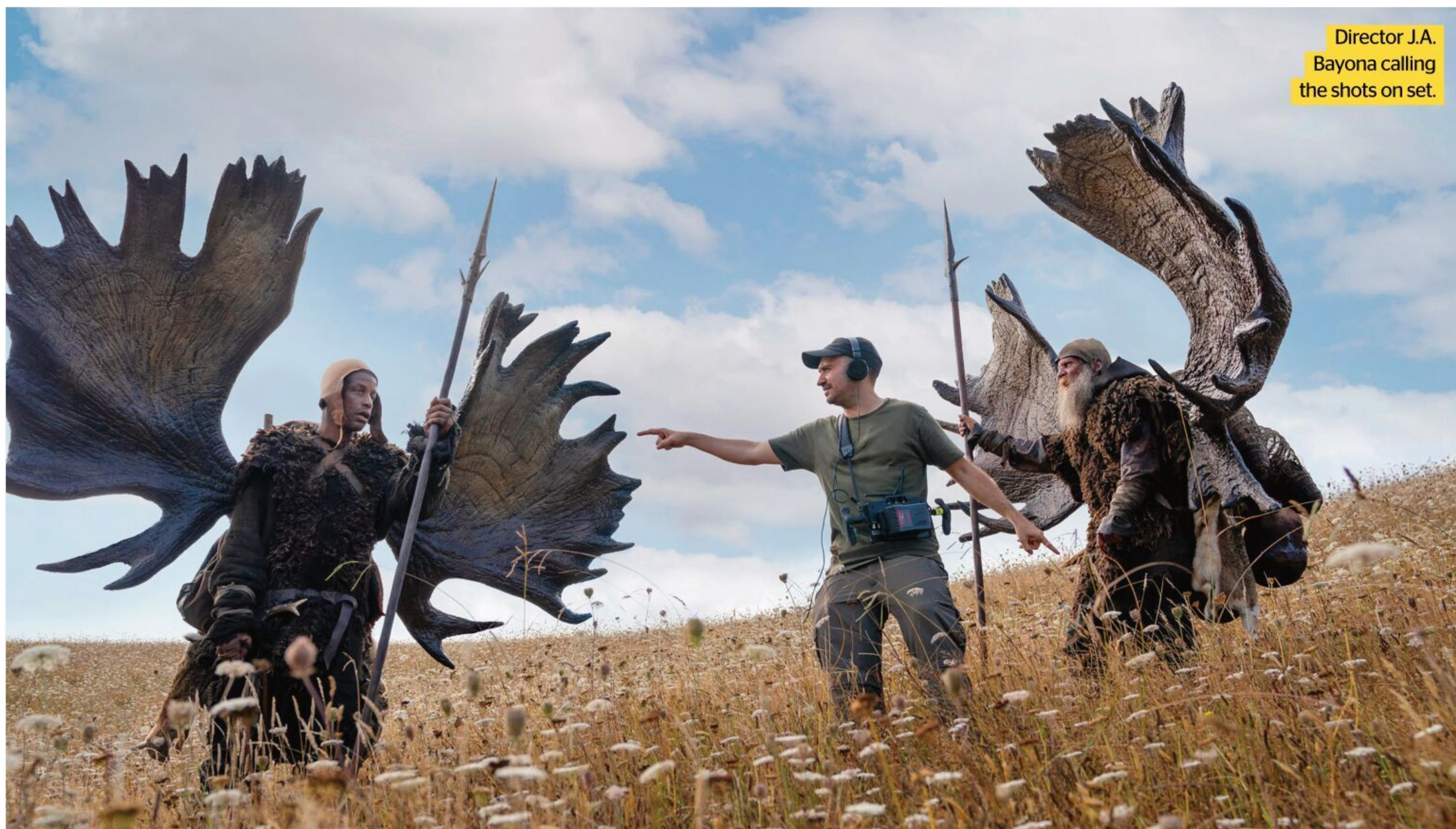
There are camera tricks to make you look smaller than the other actors. What was that trickery like?

Arthur: We experimented with every aspect, with every trick and skill that we could think of. Some of it was easy. Some of it worked. Some of it didn't. And, yes, my eyeline was a tennis ball on many occasions. And it was just like: "Great, of course it is!"

Nomvete: I had some coloured tape in some fairly racy areas [for the eyeline]. I remember Rob [Aramayo] going, "I don't think I need any tape for this one. I know where to look." [laughs] The directors and crew were brilliant at honouring the fact that the best version for us is when we're talking to the other actor. That wasn't always possible. But we found that everyone was getting what they needed. **JACK SHEPHERD**



Director J.A.
Bayona calling
the shots on set.



➤ During the Second Age, Middle-earth was at relative peace. “Even at times of peace in Tolkien, you have a brooding sense of whispers over that mountain range,” says Payne. “There’s always something bubbling just underneath the surface.” Bayona spotlights Galadriel, who “has this instinct that evil is not finished yet” but finds that everyone around her is in denial. Aramayo describes Elrond as having “a complicated relationship”

think about these huge blockbusters, these huge productions, it’s more about the set-pieces,” the director says. “But doing that scene, I knew it was not about the set-pieces. *That* was what the show is about.”

That doesn’t mean *The Rings Of Power* lacks epic battles. “All the things you love, there will be some version of that in the show,” Payne says. “But also, there will be things you’ve never seen of Middle-earth before.

‘THIS IS CASTING THE BEST PEOPLE FOR THE ROLES’

SOPHIA NOMVETE

to peace, while Walker says Gil-galad’s story looks at what it truly means to be an immortal Elf: “We really embrace the sensation of everyone you know and loving having passed. It’s about having your heart broken over and over and over again, through thousands of years. How do you still muster the ability to find hope in the endless cycle of good versus evil?”

These are weighty themes – and the depth to which they are explored differentiates the series from every other Tolkien adaptation. Thanks to the nature of television, there’s more time for characters to simply talk to each other. Bayona points to a scene in the second episode in which Galadriel and Elrond have a seven-minute conversation. “Normally, when you

“We talk about the Dwarves a lot,” he continues. “Dwarves have often been the punchline or comic relief. But we feel that the Dwarves in Tolkien have a rich spirituality and culture and history. We really wanted to take Dwarves seriously. But will our Dwarves have moments that make you laugh? Yes, definitely. Will there still be creatures and monsters and fighting and battles and armies? All those things.” McKay promises that, from the very first episode, the series hits the ground running. “It absolutely has twists and turns and action and intensity and things that are going to be scary and things that are going to be surprising,” he says.

To demonstrate the sheer scale of the project, Payne says there are over 9,500 VFX shots in the first season alone (TF asks whether Amazon gave them a blank cheque to which exec producer Weber says there were “limitations” put in place). And each season – there are five commissioned – will try to outdo the last.

“We feel that it’s important that we get into a game of trying to top ourselves, and do something more outrageous and crazy than we’ve done, or someone else has done,” McKay says. “Sometimes the answer is to go underneath, to go deeper into character, and deeper into the emotional intensity of a moment. We want to make Orcs scary again. Let’s get away from the potential feeling of mass armies of thousands of Orcs. One orc can be terrifying. Sometimes ‘small’ can be bigger, and feel bigger, and have an intensity that’s even more powerful. Escalation is really important, and we want to blow people’s minds visually in terms of the set-pieces and action, but we’re not about spectacle for spectacle’s sake.”

They’re also not about bringing in superfluous characters from Tolkien mythology just for the sake of a cameo. “It’s pretty important to us that there’s some real precedent in the lore and the themes that obsessed Tolkien,” says McKay. ➤





➤ Weber adds that they're "open to anything with these characters," even the return of Ian McKellen as Gandalf. The actor, who portrayed the wizard in Jackson's movies, previously expressed a desire to return to Middle-earth, joking that "it's the one part you can't be too old for". Asked whether McKellen could reprise the role in the show, Weber says: "Who would say no to Ian McKellen? Nobody on the planet would say no to Ian McKellen." When *TF* presses McKay on Gandalf showing up, though, he once more points to Tolkien's work being the guiding principle. "That's a non-answer, but that's what I'm giving you," he adds.

Indeed, the secrecy around *The Rings Of Power* is surprising considering the series is based on decades-old source material. Weber says the production worked on a comparative level to how Lucasfilm and Marvel keep their projects from leaking. The sets were paperless

and costumes were covered up so long-lens photographers couldn't snap and share spoilers.

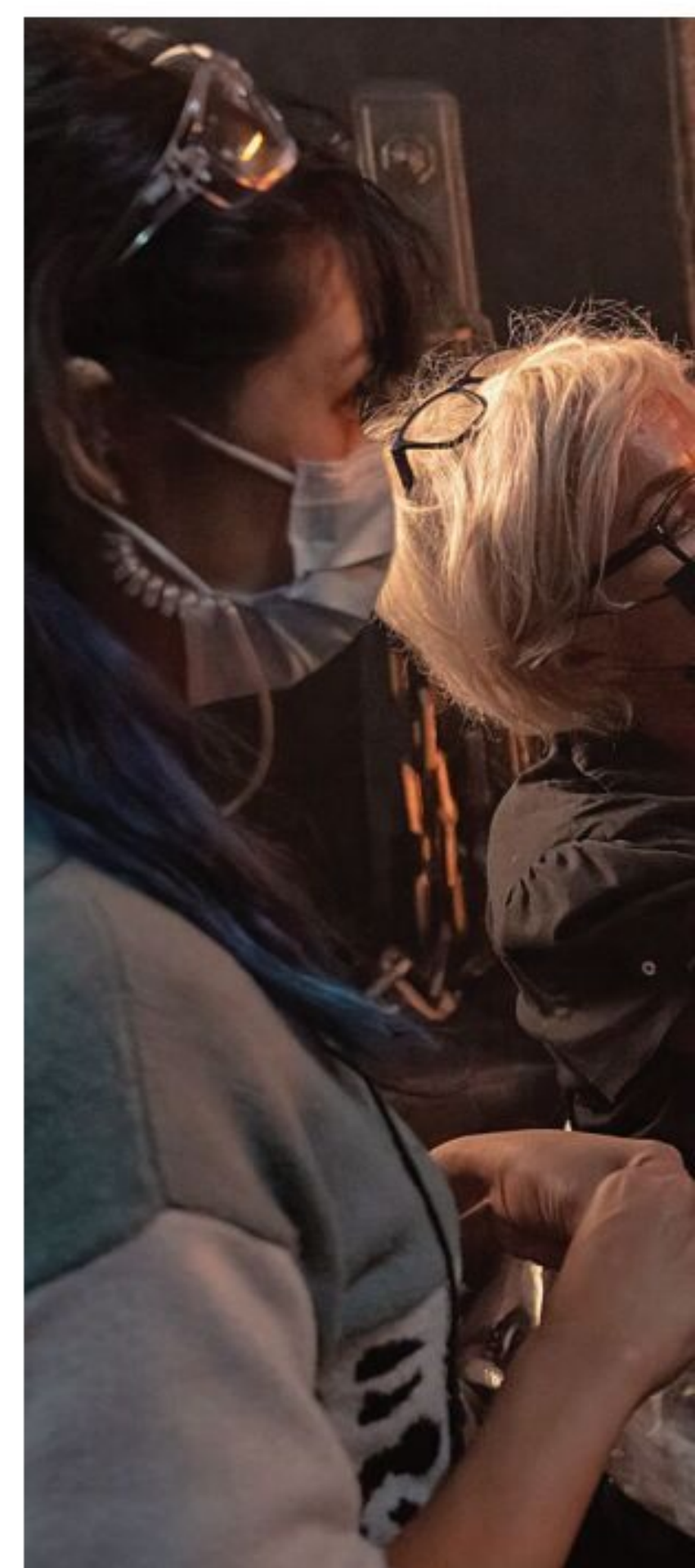
CAVE TROLLS

As a result, there's frankly an almost unprecedented lack of leaks from the series – and there's so much to keep secret. The showrunners will introduce several new characters never mentioned in Tolkien's work (but who have that Tolkien feel). That includes Ismael Cruz Córdova's Arondir, an elf with a forbidden human love-interest (reminiscent of the story of Aragorn and Arwen); Lenny Henry's harfoot elder Sadoc Burrows; and Joseph Mawle as the mysterious Oren (the hair and make-up team tell *TF* that his look was the hardest to get right – make of that what you will).

For the first time, people of all creeds and colours will inhabit Middle-earth.

Nomvete's Disa, for instance, is the first non-white Dwarf to ever appear on screen. "This is a miracle for someone like me," she says. "It's something that I never dreamed could happen because of the history of television and film. And it is desperately important for our industry, for our time, for the world to be able to see versions of themselves on screen; to be able to celebrate and redress the balance of what we see on television and particularly productions of this magnitude. This is casting the best people for the roles, but it is accepting that those people can, and should, look like I do. It's an honour to be able to stand and be a poster child of that."

With such a diverse cast in a typically white space, there have been accusations of political correctness. From the bowels of Mordor, they complain, without any real proof, that the series is trying to introduce modern-day talking points





The scale of the set-pieces is promised to rival any blockbuster film.



Sophia Nomvete gets the deluxe treatment as she prepares for a shot.

and does not reflect Tolkien's text – something the showrunners dismiss as the hearsay of Nazgûl trying to send the world back into a dark time before even the First Age.

"Tolkien wrote about it at length," McKay says. "This was one of his debate points with C.S. Lewis, his friend and colleague. It was very important that what he was creating was not an allegory. He was not commenting on historical events of his time or another time. He was not trying to transmit a message that spoke to contemporary politics. He wanted to create a mythos that was timeless, and would be applicable – that was his word, 'applicable' – the applicability across times.

"Every single choice we've made at every turn of making this show has been to be faithful to that aspiration, because that's what we want as viewers. We don't want to adapt the material in a way that might feel dated. We aspire to being timeless. That's why these books still speak to people so much, because so much of what's in them has not aged a day. And we aspire to do the same thing. And I think we feel that once people see the show, and see what the stories and

"This is one of the most massive canvases that any storyteller has ever really had," Payne says. He points to Isildur, a character whose fate is known by even casual fans, and how they wanted to analyse how the warrior became the man who defeats Sauron yet refuses to cast the One Ring into the fires of Mount Doom. "That's one of 50 examples I could pull out of places or people or cultures or events that will eventually pay off in this massive way, in the 40th hour through 50th, in hours zero through eight. And now from nine through to 16 – we're starting Season 2, and we're saying, 'How are we going to plant those seeds so that we can reap the harvest years down the road?'"

Production has moved from New Zealand to the UK for the second season, with sets being shipped halfway around the world. And while it appears these 50 hours of television are set in stone, McKay says there's still room for manoeuvring. He likens the situation to a road trip, where you aim for one destination but perhaps you see something on the horizon and you go and visit that place, and then perhaps you stop there a little longer

'ONE ORC CAN BE TERRIFYING. SOMETIMES "SMALL" CAN BE BIGGER'

PATRICK MCKAY

characters and worlds are in context, they'll feel the same way."

Another talking point, this one among common folk, has been about the expedited timeline the series is set across. Rather than have the Second Age run for thousands of years, the showrunners – working with the Tolkien estate – condensed the story, otherwise humans would be dying between episodes (due to their short lifespans) and only Elven characters would be in every season. A non-linear series was considered, but that, McKay explains, would have stopped the audience from emotionally investing in the series. Payne points out how plenty of real-life historical dramas do the same thing and says their guiding principle was respect for the "spirit and feeling" of the Second Age.

McKay and Payne will certainly have enough space to explore a multitude of engaging stories across their series: Amazon bought the rights to one long 50-hour story, and McKay and Payne approached the story as such. Things that happen in the first season, consisting of eight hour-long episodes, may not pay off until the final season.

than anticipated, like how Frodo and Sam, when they reached the Black Gates of Mordor, changed course and went via Shelob's Lair, but still reached the same destination.

"You always want to take advantage of opportunities," McKay says. "We don't approach the work as trying to fit a plan or a colour scheme. We approach the work as: you're always marching in the same direction, but along the way, you leave room for discovery and surprise. We're always looking for discoveries, but we have real tentpoles and big concepts and ideas and moments that will probably float to the top no matter what's going on in the waves."

It seems McKay and Payne and their cast have a long, expected journey ahead of them, and as each cast member reveals their hunger to return to Middle-earth, *TF*'s reminded of something a Hobbit who lived in a hole once said: "I think I'm quite ready for another adventure." *The Lord Of The Rings* is back, different, and more ambitious than ever.

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GOING ROGUE

ANDOR Digging into the backstory of Diego Luna's Cassian...

Rogue One was a glorious *Star Wars* experiment – the first anthology film in a galactic franchise ripe for further exploration. Gareth Edwards' epic told the story of a small group of Rebels who defied an Empire and stole the plans for the enemy's ultimate weapon, the Death Star. Now comes the spin-off to the spin-off, a Disney+ series

that delves into the origins of Diego Luna's breakout character, Cassian Andor.

"*Rogue One* is very much about the event, and now the journey of *Andor* is about the character," Luna tells *Total Film* at Star Wars Celebration, where the first trailer played to thunderous applause. "It's a huge show, and it's epic, and it has this thriller aspect and spy-ish tone. Yet, it's also a very intimate story of the awakening and transformation of a man. It reminds us that we are all capable of doing great stuff. We're all capable of finding out that we are a tool of change."

Spoiler alert: *Rogue One* concludes with Cassian sacrificing himself to make sure the Death Star plans are safely delivered to Princess Leia. The upcoming series, however, starts five years prior to that, with Cassian

IT'S A VERY DIFFERENT KIND OF STORYTELLING

TONY GILROY

"as far as you can imagine away" from being a hero. Luna points to a moment in *Rogue One* where Cassian tells Felicity Jones' Jyn Erso with a ferocious conviction that he's "been in this fight since I was six years old".

"That talks about a wounded man," he says. "We find him in a place where he's not aware of how capable he is of transforming or being part of change or executing such a sacrifice, but he is the man that comes out from fighting since he was six years old. He's a very interesting, dark, wounded person. You're not

DISNEY/LUCASFILM



Diego Luna dives into Cassian Andor's past - and a drink - in *Andor*.

going to believe that he's capable of what he does in *Rogue One*."

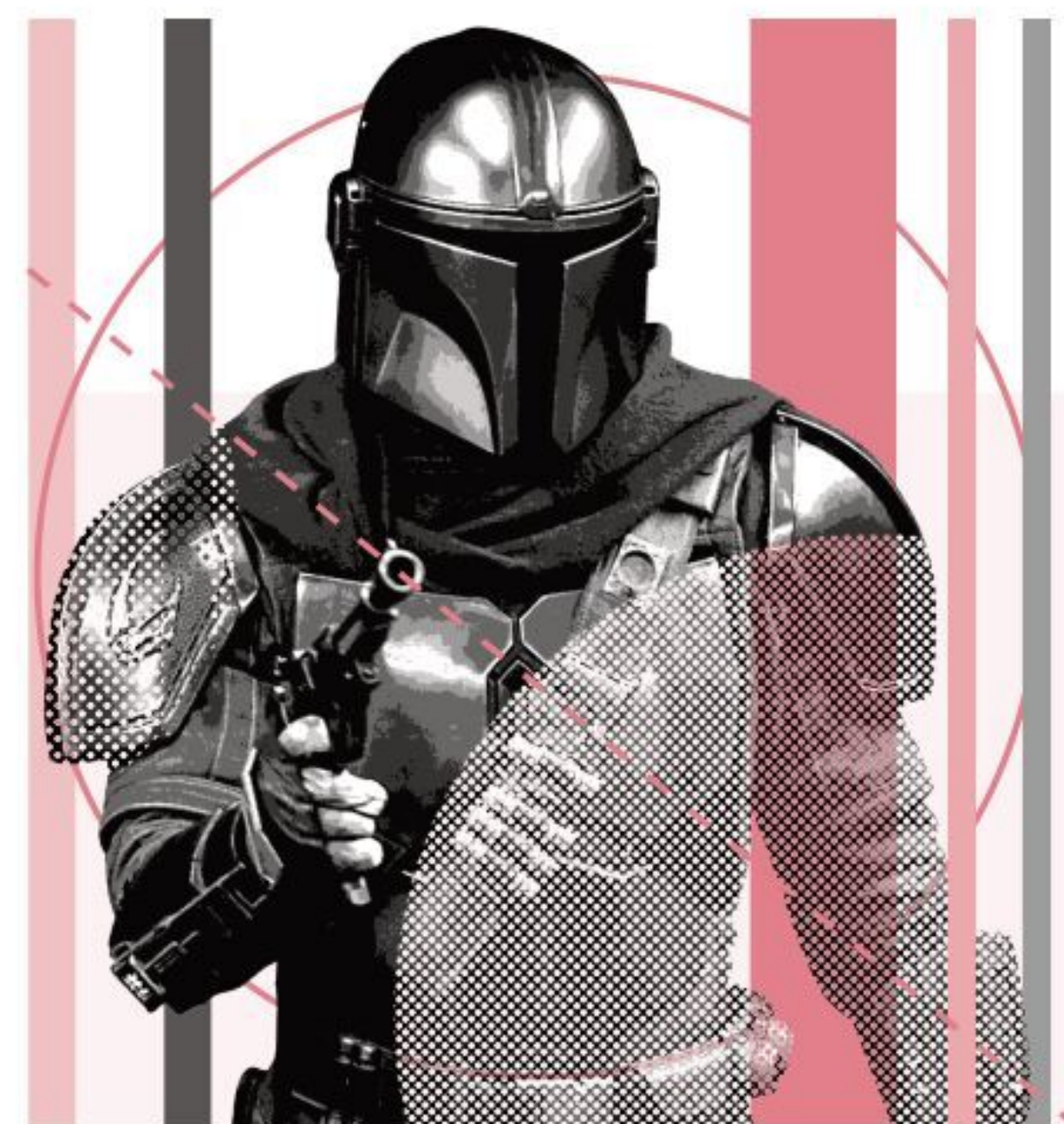
The beauty of *Andor* being a series is that there's more room to tell extended stories about a vast array of characters. "It's a very different kind of storytelling," showrunner Tony Gilroy - who helped pen *Rogue One*'s script - says, having just stepped off the Celebration stage. "The biggest is the depth of storytelling, the amount of behaviour in it, the amount of interaction."

Andor will be two seasons long, the first batch of 12 episodes taking place across a single year in *Star Wars* continuity, and the second season stretching out across the subsequent four years, leading directly into *Rogue One*. "That five-year period sees people under really extreme circumstances," Gilroy teases,

with executive producer Sanne Wohlenberg describing *Andor* as "a very long mini-series" that's "Dickensian by way of *Star Wars*".

Genevieve O'Reilly, who returns as Mon Mothma, also uses the word "Dickensian" - reference to how *Andor* balances many stories, not just that of Cassian. "This show is a broad ensemble," she says with her Irish lilt. "There are so many extraordinary characters, played by Fiona Shaw, Denise Gough, Kyle Soller, Adria Arjona, Stellan Skarsgård, and Diego Luna. There are lots of stories." When *Andor* arrives on Disney+, then, prepare for an "ambitious" ensemble unlike anything we've previously seen in that galaxy far, far away. As O'Reilly confidently says: "It's going to be pretty special." **JACK SHEPHERD**

ETA 31 AUGUST, DISNEY+



THE MANDALORIAN SEASON 3

I cannot tell you anything," Katee Sackhoff, the actor under the helmet of Bo-Katan, tells *Total Film* when asked about the upcoming season of *The Mandalorian*. Such is the secrecy around the series that Disney has kept the trailer - revealed at Star Wars Celebration - offline. However, *TF* has witnessed the footage and can reveal that it's epic in scope, with Mando venturing to the planet Mandalore to be "forgiven for his transgressions" after removing his helmet. There's also a glimpse of Pedro Pascal's hero seemingly leading a group of Mandalorians.

"If he is stepping into a leadership position, he's reluctant to do so," Pascal teases. "I don't think that there's anything more interesting than a character being forced into discovering what they're capable of, and who they are. That part has been really, really fun." Sackhoff, meanwhile, teases that Bo-Katan is dealing with the disappointment of not taking back the Darksaber. "Any time you have a goal and you don't succeed, I think you re-evaluate," she says.

Elsewhere, Moff Gideon's still causing trouble - despite being incarcerated. Giancarlo Esposito says the character's "biding his time" and collecting information "so that, when I'm free, I can use that information to my betterment". And then there's The Armourer battling her own beliefs. "We've seen that she is able to shift her ideas and shift her thinking according to what is for the greater good," says Emily Swallow, referring to how The Armourer went from cursing the Jedi to tasking Mando with looking after Grogu. Maybe The Way is not so clear after all...

JACK SHEPHERD

ETA 2023 TBC, DISNEY+



POWER OF ATTORNEY

It's not easy being green. Just ask Jennifer Walters, the reluctant hero in Marvel's new legal comedy **SHE-HULK: ATTORNEY AT LAW**. Total Film speaks to the show's dream team about feminism, Fleabag and finding the MCU's funny bone.

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM



From the sitcom-smashing *WandaVision* to the metaverse-bending antics of *Loki* and the downright WTF weirdness of *Moon Knight*, the MCU's small-screen output has taught us one thing: expect the unexpected. So back in December 2020, when Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige revealed that new Disney+ show *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law* was going to be a "half-hour legal comedy", fans took it in their stride.

First appearing in Marvel Comics in 1980, She-Hulk is the green-hued alter-ego of Jennifer Walters, cousin to scientist Bruce Banner. Taking an emergency blood transfusion from him, she inherits some of his unique abilities – turning green, muscling up. But unlike Banner's rage-fuelled Hulk, she retains her intelligence and personality when she transforms. "She's angry in a different way!" laughs *She-Hulk* head writer Jessica Gao, when *Total Film* meets her over Zoom.

With Feige confirming that Walters/She-Hulk would be played by *Orphan Black* star Tatiana Maslany, the die was cast for what will surely be one of the most unique MCU projects to date. "That was always the needle that we were trying to thread – how do we have something that really is a half-hour legal comedy and feels a little bit like *Ally McBeal*, but still exists within the Marvel Cinematic Universe?" says lead director Kat Coiro, speaking poolside in sunny L.A. "That was the challenge."

In the writers' room, the legal eagle references were less *Ally McBeal* and more *The Good Fight* and *Better Call Saul*. Then there were more leftfield nods. "We talked a lot about *Fleabag*," says Gao, nodding to Phoebe Waller-Bridge's uncompromising British show about a woman traversing her thirties. "The irreverence of [*Fleabag*] and the sense of humour... there's a lot there that I can definitely see that they drew from as inspiration," says Maslany, the 36-year-old Canadian, today sporting a mop of blonde curls.

The *Fleabag* allusions also speak to the very core of the show. "Because the greater Marvel Cinematic Universe has already done a fantastic job of huge action, enormous stakes," notes Gao. "It's always the fate of the universe, the fate of the free world. But that can't be every single day. What happens in between those movies when these characters just have to live their lives, when they have to go on dates, when they have to go grocery shopping, when they have to see their family at a reunion?"

Jennifer is hardly delighted by inheriting superpowers when all she wants to do is navigate her career and love life (not easy when you're capable of lifting your date over the threshold, rather than the other way round). "We definitely explore what it's like to be a modern woman dating online," explains



Maslany's Jennifer Walters (right) with Ginger Gonzaga's Nikki, as Jennifer finds her existence upended and supersized in *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law*.

Coiro. "It was just so embarrassingly human, and that's what drew me in," adds Maslany. "I loved seeing that her dating life was just as much of a stress as potentially becoming one of the Avengers."

Gao, whose own comedy background includes cult animation *Rick And Morty*, had previously pitched several shows to Marvel without success. "Every time I would say 'Hey, I know this didn't work out. But if you ever do *She-Hulk*, you have to call me because if you don't, I will come back and burn this building to the ground.'" When they finally brought her in to talk about the character, "Kevin [Feige] came into the room and said, 'Well, we called you... so you can't burn us down!'"

Indicating just how obsessed Gao is with the character first created by the legendary Stan Lee, the writer clearly knows her Marvel history. A big fan of *The Sensational She-Hulk*, by

writer-artist John Byrne, published in the early 1990s, Gao adored the fourth-wall-breaking aspect of the run. "I love that she was self-aware, that she knew she was a comic-book character. I just loved how meta it was. And I also loved that that run just had fun with her. It was her poking fun at all these comic-book tropes."

LEGAL METAS

Whether that becomes a staple in the TV show – there are rumours Feige will either appear or be referenced – she's not saying. Instead, she "cherry-picked" from across the various iterations of the character, including those written by Dan Slott in the mid-2000s and Charles Soule in the 2010s. "We picked a lot from the Slott run and the Soule run," she confirms, which hints at the direction of the show. Slott's work in particular adopted a 'case



suits), but it was observing him on set that really helped. “He did this thing where he was laying down, and he transformed into Hulk standing up,” she says. “Like he got up in this way that didn’t look human. I couldn’t understand how he went from horizontal to totally vertical, from Bruce to Hulk, in this seamless way. I was watching that. And I took a lot from that physical character work he does.”

Alongside Bruce Banner, Benedict Wong’s Sorcerer Supreme Wong also returns for some mystical action. And, intriguingly, Tim Roth is back as Emil Blonsky, the Russian-born soldier who mutated into the monstrous Abomination in 2008’s *The Incredible Hulk* (when Edward Norton, and not Ruffalo, played the title role). As sharp-eyed fans will know, Abomination reappeared in 2021’s *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings*, fighting with Wong. Now he’s back – Blonsky incarcerated in a clear-plastic circular cell like a latter-day Hannibal Lecter.

“I thought it was so interesting to watch Tim take that character and really tie the thread to the original character that he developed way back,” says Coiro. “Everyone who had been in an MCU project had an adjustment coming on to this, because it is different. And I would say he probably had the biggest adjustment, because that movie was at the very beginning of the run. And it was very serious. It didn’t have the comedic overtones or undertones that a lot of the later Marvel projects had. So yeah, there was definitely that calibration. How outrageous can we go here? How sitcom can we go?”

It’s a fair question. Comedy has increasingly become part of the MCU, especially in James Gunn’s *Guardians Of The Galaxy* movies and Taiki Waititi’s recent *Thor* efforts. “I think so many people in the MCU have comedy chops,” says Ginger Gonzaga, who plays Jennifer’s BFF Nikki. “We just mine that out of Mark Ruffalo and mine it out of Benedict Wong. Benny can be so serious in the *Doctor Strange* movies. But in the most recent *Doctor Strange*, he had the funniest one-liners. And so in ours, we get to pull that out of Benny more.”

With a strong comedic background, including the Paul Rudd-starring Netflix show *Living With Yourself* and Netflix’s *Space Force*, Gonzaga went into the show delighted that Gao was happy for her to improvise and “put your Ginger stink on it!” Alongside Josh Segarra, who plays another in their close-knit circle, Gonzaga’s character is nowhere near as “buttoned up” as Jennifer. “I think that’s why they make for really good friends. I’m kind of the wildcard and she is my straight-laced buddy, even though she ends up also being a superhero.”

The wildest of wildcards must surely be Titania, *She-Hulk*’s antagonist across the series, who first hit the comics in 1984’s *Secret Wars*. “There were a lot of recurring villains that are enemies to everybody or to multiple heroes, and Titania was one of the few that was very ➤➔



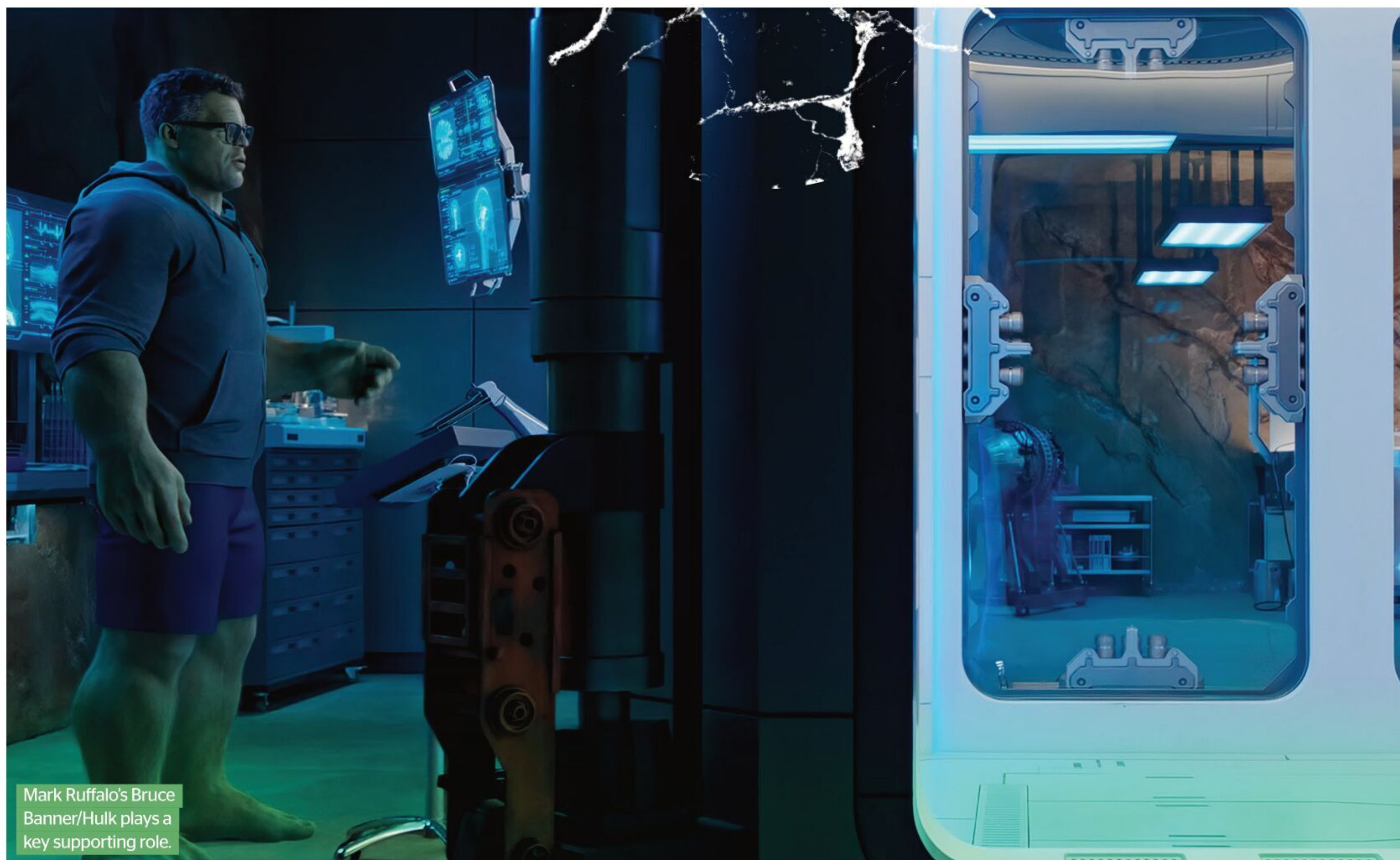
‘IT WAS JUST SO EMBARRASSINGLY HUMAN’

TATIANA MASLANY

of the week’ style, as you might expect from a legal sitcom, as Walters becomes a lawyer specialising in superhuman law.

Yet *She-Hulk* also cherry-picks from the MCU, with Mark Ruffalo’s Bruce Banner playing a key part in the story, as he tutors his cousin in how best to deal with the Hulk-ness of it all. Despite Ruffalo first playing Hulk in 2012’s *Avengers Assemble*, “what’s so magical about Mark is he approached it as if it was a brand-new role,” says Coiro. “And in a way it was because it is a slightly different genre than what he’s done before. There’s a lot of dialogue in a way that Hulk has never quite had. And him and Tatiana’s chemistry as cousins was fantastic.” Maslany readily agrees: “It felt very familial very quickly.”

Maslany gleaned what she could from Ruffalo. They talked themes (loneliness) and techniques (dealing with those pesky mo-cap



Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner/Hulk plays a key supporting role.

➤ specific to She-Hulk,” explains Gao, when *TF* asks why she chose this flame-haired anti-hero. “In the comics... she was kind of laser focused on She-Hulk. She had this fixation on She-Hulk that was very specific to her.”

Playing her is Jameela Jamil, the British star of *The Good Place* who briefly worked with Coiro on her 2022 comedy *Marry Me* (the director calls her “jaw-droppingly beautiful” and “very fierce”). Originally codenamed ‘Lucy’, when casting calls were first made, the character was described as a “glamorous social media influencer, Kardashian-esque with a dark side”. But as Coiro notes, don’t think Kim. “She is not the Kardashians! She is her own character. And she is rooted also in the comics, but with a modern twist.”

While Jamil is reluctant to give too much away, she praises the show’s progressive casting. “We haven’t seen a lot of South Asians involved in many things where we aren’t playing shopkeepers or terrorists.... it just shows that [Kevin Feige] is putting his money where his mouth is.” Likewise, bringing on a female showrunner and directors, Coiro and Anu Valia (who helmed three of the nine episodes). “It’s very, very important for a lot of women to be involved in the show, because it is a show about a woman,” shrugs Gao. “And women, like any other group, are not a monolith. That’s why it’s very important to have so many different perspectives within that community.”

Thankfully, the femaleness of it all hasn’t irked the internet trolls. Perhaps because the red (or green?) mist descended when the first trailer dropped, with fans decrying the CGI look of the titular character. Comparisons to *Shrek*’s Princess Fiona and Jim Carrey in *The Mask* swept the message boards. This was followed by VFX artist Sean Ruecroft, claiming

‘WE DON’T SEE A LOT OF WOMEN’S BODIES THAT ARE MUSCULAR’

TATIANA MASLANY

Marvel’s top brass meddled with original versions of the character: “Apparently she was bigger early on,” he said in a since-deleted tweet, “but the notes kept saying to ‘make her smaller.’ We always roll our eyes... but at the end of the day artists gotta follow orders.”

Coiro sighs when *TF* asks if there was ever a mandate from on high to ensure She-Hulk looked less buff. “I mean, those online rumours are so funny, because it’s such a big conversation. And there are so many iterations and there are things that we tried and things that work and things that don’t work, and it was never about buff or less buff,

but really about keeping her very strong, but also not having her veer into the kind of hokey and impossible CGI monster land. If she was much bigger, then she becomes unreal.”

It wasn’t the only criticism faced online; some fans called for a bodybuilder to be cast in the lead role, à la Lou Ferrigno, who played Hulk in the popular 1970s TV series. “The point is, she’s a very petite regular woman who gains these superpowers. And so there has to be a big transition between Jennifer Walters and She-Hulk,” says Coiro. “And so, we really wanted to embrace Tatiana as she is, and then build her She-Hulk in CGI.” Nonetheless, in the interests of body-positivity, Maslany feels the conversation around “what we expect She-Hulk to look like” to be an interesting one.

“There was never question around how other superheroes looked physically but there’s a real stress around her body,” she argues. “And I think that says a lot about people, what they expect, what they want, and what they’re missing. The fact that she isn’t incredibly muscular is very disappointing to some people. And I can totally understand that. Because we don’t see a lot of women’s bodies that are incredibly muscular... I do feel very strongly about bodies being different on camera and allowing for different shapes to be our





focus. And I completely get why people would be disappointed.”

According to Coiro, She-Hulk is beautiful, regardless of her unusual appearance. “She’s really not a monster in the same way that the Hulk was. She really is this beautiful, larger-than-life woman. And so it’s a lot less about being a monster and more what it means to be a woman who takes up a lot of space, who can’t help but walk into a room and be noticed. And I think it’s something that a lot of women grapple with... a lot of women want to make themselves smaller. To be forced to be large, to be the centre of attention and be the focal point in a room... I think it’s something that is scary to a lot of women.”

A *Fleabag*-esque sitcom about female empowerment? *She-Hulk* looks then to have carved itself an intriguing niche in the MCU, just like *Moon Knight* and *WandaVision*. “I think, in the vein of that kind of a show, *She-Hulk* really does something different,” adds Maslany. “And it’s going to be unexpected, the same way that *Thor: Ragnarok* surprised me. Suddenly we’re in a totally different tone. Characters that we’ve come to expect to be this way have been flipped on their heads.” Or as Gao puts it, “Everything is just inherently funnier when you see a six-foot-seven green woman doing it.”

SHE-HULK: ATTORNEY AT LAW STREAMS ON DISNEY+ FROM 17 AUGUST.



Q&A

JAMEELA JAMIL

You’d worked with Kat Coiro on *Marry Me*. Did she sign you up here?

Originally, I avoided Marvel auditions because I look quite pathetic when I run. A boyfriend of mine and I once missed a Eurostar because he’d stopped to laugh so much at my run. And so it made me feel very self-conscious. And so Kat called me directly to try to convince me, because I had missed both rounds of the auditions for any part and I’d just hidden like a coward. And she totally lied about the role – there’ll be no action!

So what training did you do? Can you run now?

My run is vaguely less embarrassing! I had to learn jiu-jitsu and martial arts. And I had to learn how to also do that sometimes in the air. Which was really fun. I got to learn how to use a harness. And I mean, I am honestly the world’s most epic couch potato. Such a Brit. Built like a Flump! But it was insane. I became very strong and muscular for a while. I now feel as though all women especially should learn martial arts, because I feel safer in an Uber than I’ve ever felt. I almost feel too aggy... I need to chill out!

What can you say about your character?

She is very aggressive... and there isn’t a character quite like her in the Marvel [*Cinematic*] Universe. I’m excited to see what people think of her.

Is she funny?

It’s an extremely ridiculous over the top character, but I think the show is very acerbic. It’s unlike anything else that is out there in the world, including in the Marvel [*Cinematic*] Universe. It’s definitely more in the *Guardians*, *Deadpool* [*mould, with*] tongue-in-cheek, sarcastic, very blunt humour. What’s great is that we don’t in any way sweeten the pill. **JM**



THE FLAME GAME

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON George R.R. Martin reopens the doors on House Targaryen...

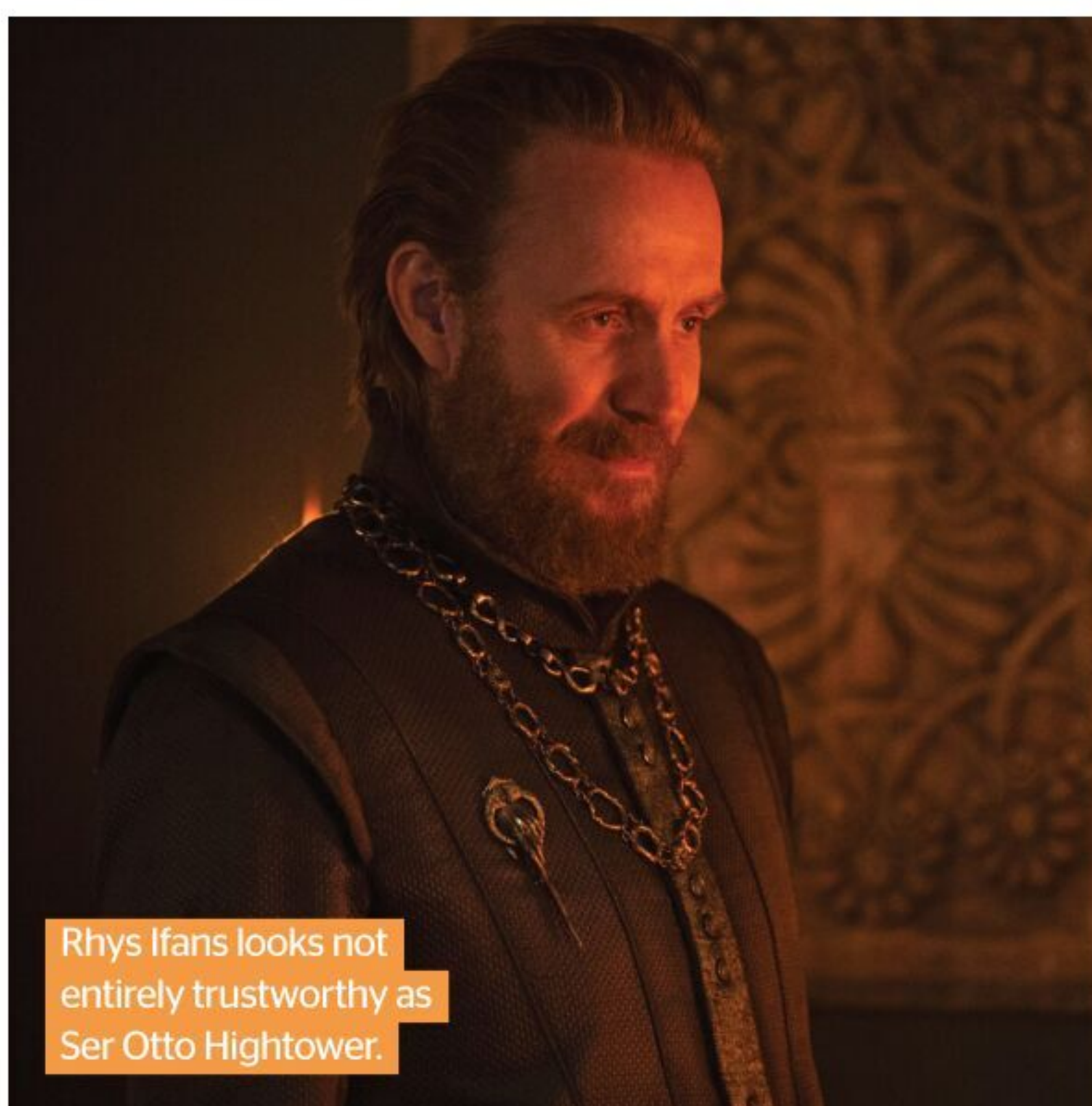
Even before the ash of Daenerys Targaryen's lethal conflagration had settled, rumours stirred of prequels to HBO's *Game Of Thrones*. As ever with matters on the George R.R. Martin front, things proceeded slowly and not every hopeful survived; true to Westeros form, one starry prequel died a cruel death after its pilot was shot. But the MEU (Martin Expanded Universe) is finally set to launch skyward on screen with *House Of The Dragon*. And as imagined-history source book *Fire And Blood* doth foretell, the clouds will rain dragon fire.

The first in a proposed two-part saga, *Fire And Blood* plots the fall of the tumultuous Targaryen dynasty, beginning long before Dany touched the flames. Narrated (unreliably, leaving room for onscreen variation) by an Archmaester, Martin's tale involves conquerors and queens, lusty siblings and sex with horses, grim plagues and the unpleasantries of "gelding". Events lead to the Dance of the Dragons, a ferocious civil war featuring enough flying-lizard action to satisfy anyone who still gets tingles recalling Jon Snow pet Drogon.

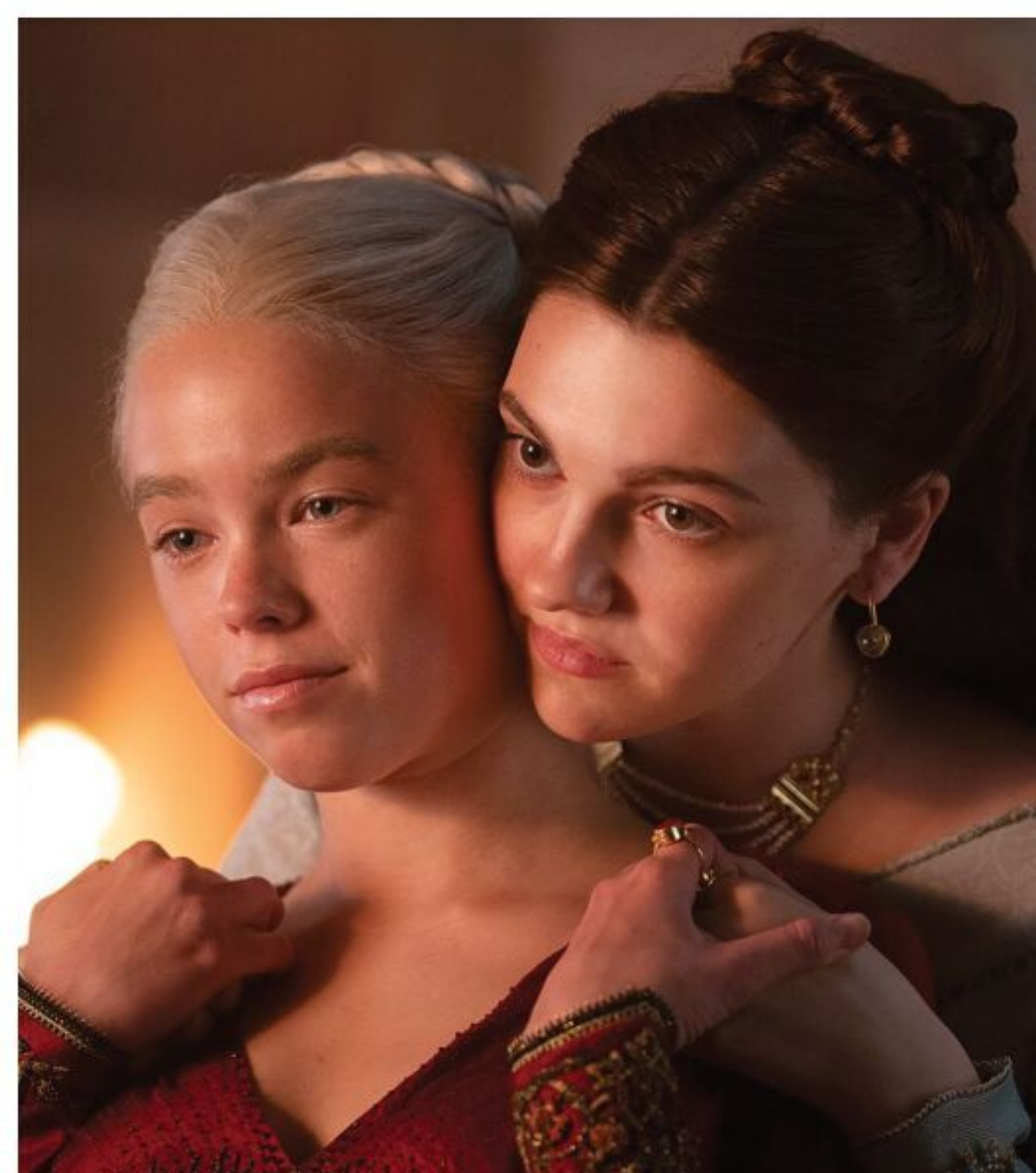
On the ground level, two familiar names run the show. Miguel Sapochnik directed some of *Thrones*' fiercest episodes, including 'Hardhome' and 'Battle Of The Bastards'. Ryan Condal, meanwhile, honed his form with out-sized stand-offs as a co-writer on *Rampage*, among other projects.

A tantalising cast will render this hugely complex history of sex, betrayal and fiery violence in flesh and blood. Martin has compared one book-to-screen improvement to Sibel Kekilli's heart-breaking Shae in *Thrones*: "In a similar vein, I am vastly

Emma D'Arcy's Rhaenyra and Matt Smith's Daemon, presumably comparing hair care tips.



Rhys Ifans looks not entirely trustworthy as Ser Otto Hightower.





STEVE TOUSSAINT

Meet the Sea Snake...

Who is your character, Lord Corlys Velaryon?

He's nicknamed the Sea Snake. He's the richest man in the land and married to Rhaenys, a princess, who's part of the Targaryen family related to King Viserys. When the previous king needed a successor, he had no children of his own. Lord Corlys felt the best person for monarch would be his wife. But there's never been a woman on the throne, so they chose Viserys. Corlys is very much obsessed with his family name meaning something and getting closer to the throne. His vaulting ambition for his wife and children is a character flaw.

What training was involved?

Lord Corlys carries a huge staff. On one end is a double-edged blade, on the other a heavy metal ball used to crush skulls. I practised with eight or nine stunt men for weeks. Of course, once on set where there's smoke and sand everywhere and people coming at you from all angles, it felt like I was just flailing and shouting. I'm hoping it looks competent and sexy.

A Sea Snake spin-off is in development...

It's going to be somebody younger and prettier because it's meant to be Sea Snake's earlier adventures. The legend is that he made these nine great voyages, which is how he got his wealth. So, I don't really see them putting me in it. I'd lobby for it, but I don't think so!

You could do bookends in each episode.

Exactly! Sitting in an armchair with a big book. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**



'IT'S DARK, IT'S POWERFUL, IT'S VISCERAL...

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

impressed by the show's version of King Viserys, played by Paddy Considine, who gives the character a tragic majesty that my book Viserys never quite achieved."

Elsewhere, Emma D'Arcy and Eve Best play Targaryen dragonriders Rhaenyra and Rhaenys, respectively. Matt Smith is Viserys' young warrior brother Prince Daemon, Steve Toussaint (see right) plays seafaring adventurer Lord Corlys Velaryon (aka the Sea Snake) and Rhys Ifans plays one of many Sers (try to take notes), Otto Hightower. And Otto's daughter Alicent is played by Olivia Cooke, who offers salient insights into Martin's complex,

shades-of-grey character work: "You just don't know what you're going to get with these characters."

Fire And Blood virgins won't know who will live or die horribly, either, though Martin's promises regarding the show should be noted: "It's dark, it's powerful, it's visceral... just the way I like my epic fantasy."

Flame-roasted, then, but Sapochnik accepts the show cannot simply ride on the shoulders of giant dragons we once loved: "This is something else, and should be something else... Hopefully it'll be seen as something else. But it will have to earn that – it won't happen overnight." And as Martin would attest, you shouldn't rush that old *Thrones* magic. Saddle up for the slow-burn. **KEVIN HARLEY**

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON LAUNCHES ON SKY ATLANTIC AND NOW ON 22 AUGUST.





DREAM A LITTLE BIGGER

For 30 years, filmmakers have tried and failed to adapt Neil Gaiman's revered comic **THE SANDMAN**. As the long-awaited Netflix adaptation launches, Total Film speaks to Gaiman, showrunner Allan Heinberg and the stars to ask: is this the stuff of fans' dreams?

WORDS KEVIN HARLEY

The way source author Neil Gaiman tells it, Netflix's incoming adaptation of *The Sandman* comes from both the heart and art. Working with Gaiman (*American Gods*, *Good Omens*) and executive producer David S. Goyer, the showrunner is TV, comics and *Wonder Woman* (2017) writer Allan Heinberg, who turned out to have met Gaiman long before work on the show began. "I'm not ➤➤



Dream and Lucienne overlook Morpheus' once-majestic realm.

➤ sure if he was at college at this point, or working as a writer in New York,” says Gaiman, “but I met Allan, even if I didn’t know I’d met him, in about 1996 when I signed his page of original art from [1994 *Sandman* graphic novel] *Brief Lives*.”

A former DC fan, Heinberg drifted away from comics during the so-called ‘DC implosion’ of the late ’70s, until *The Sandman* revived his ardour. “I was a huge fan at college,” he says. “My boyfriend at the time was not a comics fan. But one of the first gifts he gave me was a page from *Brief Lives*. It was a big deal not just because it was an actual *Sandman* page, which were incredibly rare even then, but because it came from a boyfriend who had no fondness for comics. It was a significant gift in many ways. Then I found myself at a signing for [Gaiman graphic novel] *Mr. Punch* with [artist] Dave McKean and Neil. I stood in line for hours and Neil signed my page, and my book, and it’s been on my wall ever since.”

Almost 30 years on, Heinberg is helping to put *The Sandman*’s first two collections, *Preludes And Nocturnes* and *The Doll’s House*, on screens in a 10-part Netflix adaptation. And to

understand why it took so long to get here, you have to understand how loved *The Sandman* is. And just what a labour of love it was to get the right version on screen.

BOOKS OF MAGIC

In *The Sandman* comics, a library of impossible books is guarded by a librarian named Lucien. Over 30-plus years, Gaiman played Lucien to his own title, pitching script ideas to bewildered studios while batting off poor attempts to adapt the comic. “I really have thrown myself in front of a truck so many times over 30 years,” says Gaiman.

In fairness, attempting to distil *The Sandman*’s mutable sweep is like trying to nail down a sandstorm. On paper, it goes a little like this. Launched in 1988, Gaiman’s series radically re-authored a vintage DC character. Lord of a realm known as the Dreaming, Morpheus (aka Dream) is a tall, thin, starry-eyed figure who, after a century of imprisonment by occultists, sets about rebuilding his kingdom. And himself. A dark horror-fantasy ensues, before increasingly ambitious developments. As Morpheus

‘TOM INNATELY HAD A SENSE OF WHO THIS MAN IS AND WHAT HIS CONFLICT IS’

ALLAN HEINBERG





undergoes humbling changes in his encounters with complex human foibles, a vast cosmology involving Dream's family the Endless, sundry demons, voluble ravens, occult investigators and more unfolds.

Brimming with wit and wonder, heart and horror, literacy and leaps of imagination, *The Sandman* sidelined superheroes to emphasise stories comics had not seen enough of. "There had never been gay people in comics," says Heinberg. "Suddenly there were gay people and trans people and non-binary people and people of colour. It was a very inclusive and loving and non-judgemental world. It captivated me and held me through to the end of its run and beyond."

That run did not unfold like other comics, either. Described by Heinberg as "an impossible format", the eight issues in *Preludes* unfold as discreet tales, linked by Dream's pursuit of his lost instruments of power. "If you look at TV and movie formats, it doesn't fit," says Heinberg. "Dream is really the only character present in each of those stories. Each story is a specific world. From a TV or streaming viewpoint, you have to

build each world, and each of those episodes has its own cast. It's not a story you could condense comfortably."

Previous scriptwriters' attempts to condense the story tended to focus on *The Doll's House*, notes Heinberg, with the character Rose Walker used as an "audience stand-in" as she faces tooth-eyed nightmare the Corinthian at an unusual convention. "You'd have Rose and Dream teamed up against the Corinthian in what were, mostly, superhero formats; Dream as superhero. And you could see the impossibility of trying to force all that story into a two-hour chunk."

Around 2013, a tantalising-sounding adaptation involving Goyer, writer Jack Thorne and star Joseph Gordon-Levitt generated buzz, before becoming one of film's great what-ifs when it collapsed three years later. *The Sandman* seemed unadaptable, until a brilliant Audible adaptation launched in 2020 gave Gaiman hope that the world was ready.

Beforehand, the sands had started shifting for Heinberg. As his contract with ABC Studios reached an end, Heinberg met Warner Bros' Susan Rovner and Clancy Collins White in May

2019 to discuss future projects and enquired about their plans for *The Sandman*. "Up until that moment, the answer had always been, 'There's a movie version – TV can't go near it.' But Neil and David [Goyer] were about to pitch to streamers, and Susan said, 'The weird thing is, we don't have a writer and we don't have a showrunner.' She and Clancy looked at each other and said to me, 'How well do you know David Goyer?' David and I had been friends through [former DC CCO] Geoff Johns, so Susan said, 'Let me talk to David and call you back.' By the time I left the office and got to my car, the phone rang and it was David, who said, 'Are you fucking kidding me? You're doing this.' It was a matter of being in the right place at the right time. I got very lucky."

Meanwhile, Gaiman believed streaming had evolved to a point where the medium could handle *The Sandman*. "I showed a trailer recently, a minute of footage, to my assistant. She said, 'This is amazing. Do you ever regret that it didn't come out earlier?' I said, 'No, because this couldn't have happened earlier.' Occasionally I'm a tiny bit wistful. It would have been wonderful to have had what ➤➤➤

Sturridge's Dream
alongside Jenna Coleman's
Johanna Constantine.



➤ we're doing now on screens in 2000. The only place that could have made it at that point would've been HBO. But HBO did not have the money to make this in 2000. And I don't think the world would've been ready for it."

WAKE-UP CALLS

"Kind of the reason *The Sandman* was a cult thing was because it was a little bit ahead of its time," says Gaiman. "One of the great things about it is how little we've had to change to make it oven-fresh for 2022."

Even the decision to relocate the modern-day stories from the late '80s to the 21st century, says Heinberg, hasn't altered them significantly: "The show did not need to be a period piece. We usually say it takes place in the present day – whenever your present day is."

Honouring the spirit of the comic books, the showrunners made subtle changes to suit the TV format and its modern-day manifestation. Long-term Dream-watchers will spot tweaks for pace and plot in the episodes, alongside sequences, scenes and set-pieces that could have been lifted from the comics' pages. Meanwhile, care has been taken to cast in the title's spirit: an inclusive spirit, accommodating gender changes and more.

Playing the character renamed Lucienne

from Lucien, Vivienne Acheampong (*The Witches*) has a crucial role. "Lucienne is Dream's most trusted member of staff," she says, "because when Morpheus was captured, she was the only one who stayed in the Dreaming. They have a close bond and he's not the easiest of beings to have a relationship with, as it were."

Elsewhere, *Doctor Who* graduate Jenna Coleman plays two generations of the Constantine family. She will star as 18th-century adventurer Lady Johanna Constantine, glimpsed in Season 1 and set to return should further series be greenlit. Beforehand, Coleman appears as Lady Johanna's modern-day descendant Johanna Constantine, a carefully developed variant on comic-book character John Constantine, the occult detective who headlined his own film in 2005. "I've been telling people I'm playing Keanu Reeves," jokes Coleman.

Casting Johanna took great care, Gaiman reports. "There's probably not a working high-profile and, in some cases, low-profile actress in the UK between the ages of 28 and

45 who didn't audition for us. We were seeing amazing people. And for whatever reason, that combination of roguish charm and cockiness and bluff and a moral vacuum with a profound moral heart at the centre of the vacuum just didn't land. Until Jenna came in and it was like, 'Oh! That's exactly the thing we've been looking for.'"

Coleman relished the chance to play what she calls the "sharper around the edges, harder and crisper" Lady Johanna and her descendant, the latter of whom emerges in the episode 'Dream A Little Dream Of Me'. In both cases, the show uses the characters'

Morpheus encounters to illuminate and change him. "There's an old soul in Johanna Constantine," says Coleman. "She's lived a lot of lives and she feels haunted by the people she loses along the way. When she meets Morpheus, it's like a meeting of egos. Morpheus is used to everyone bowing to him, but Johanna doesn't do that – she challenges him. In terms of similarities, they're both lone warriors. That was in the script but also the way it was shot – in a sort of romantic way, with him in black and her all in white."





DREAM WARRIOR

Tom Sturridge sprinkles a little sand...

You had to wait for this role. What made you stick around?

The books are some of the most beautiful, thrilling, wild, bizarre and glorious stories I've ever encountered. The opportunity to exist in the world Neil created, and to help be part of realising these things was, beyond anything, the thing that made me want to wait.

Did Neil offer useful advice to you?

An avalanche. I cannot describe how vital and comforting it was to have him present. He watched every daily and was there to support, inform, educate and inspire at all times. As far as specific bits of magic, I want to keep those to myself. But one thing he said was he wanted me to do it for a reason and that reason was connected to me. And to not try to construct something so far outside of yourself, because we spent six months looking at you and not at an idea.

How does *The Sandman* contrast with superhero stories?

I think it's closer to a kind of mythology than Superman, though of course it references the DC Universe. It is utterly extraordinary and a kind of endless ocean of narrative and storytelling. If you're coming towards *The Sandman*, you're not coming to watch *Justice League*.

What will make *The Sandman* stand out on TV?

I think it's about our dreams and by us, I mean everyone. It's about every different kind of person and the way they see the world literally and imaginatively. A lot of stories are about following one person's vision of the universe, whereas this is about all of us. **KEVIN HARLEY**

EYES WIDE SHUT

That man in black was found fast, at least initially. Gaiman recalls seeing stage/screen actor Tom Sturridge among the first 10 candidates, knowing they had their man. When lockdown gave them time to put that to the test, Warner put Sturridge on a retainer while Gaiman and company saw some 1,500 auditions before reporting to Netflix that it was Tom all along.

"Tom innately had a sense of who this man is and what his conflict is," says Heinberg. "The handicap is that Morpheus is not someone who tells you what he's thinking or feeling. He keeps his emotions at bay because, as he says, he embodies the entire collective unconscious. If he lets his guard down for a second, it could all collapse. Tom understood that. Dream sort of embodies our collective desire to connect with each other but also our knowing your heart can be broken, and Tom walks that fine line brilliantly."

For Sturridge, the wait for his casting to be confirmed had a positive effect. "It was such an awesome responsibility to take on this role. The fact that it took so long was a comfort in that it wasn't a rash decision on their part. It was something we could think about carefully, which meant that when I began working on it for real, I had a foundation."

Other wondrous casting gambits include *Game Of Thrones* stand-out Gwendoline Christie as Lucifer, casting compared by Heinberg to "a rock star in life" playing "a rock star in the book". Crucial, too, is the casting of *Killing Eve*'s Kirby Howell-Baptiste as Dream's sister Death, a character who makes mortality seem less terrifying than it might on page and does so again on screen, says Sturridge: "Kirby's a burning beam of light - unfailingly alive and present and honest."

Heinberg adds praise for David Thewlis' "gorgeous" performance as John Dee, noting the way the *Harry Potter* star teases out the damaged, tragic quality in the character. Across the cast, his main episode - '24/7' - elicits a clear consensus. "It's intense," deadpans Acheampong. Adds Coleman, "Oh, my God, the bits I've seen of that episode are fantastic."

Meanwhile, everyone concurs on how the show's feats of world-building design provide anchorage and scope. "Honestly, I felt like a

kid in a sweet shop," says Acheampong. "I became like a parody of me in an epic fantasy show. The sets and the locations were just absolutely incredible."

"Everything was tangible and palpable," says Sturridge. "It's indescribable how much that helps because, essentially, all we're doing is pretending. And the less you have to pretend, the easier it is to tell the truth."

DREAM KING

A further point of agreement hinges on Gaiman's involvement. While Acheampong says he was "absolutely integral in every aspect of the show," Coleman adds: "The show is so much about his imagination. It's such a specific world to enter. And it's a really exciting thing to be able to step into that world, because as an actor it gives you so much room, so many places to go."

Which raises a question: is there room to dream in today's well-stocked streaming universe? While streaming platforms brim with genre shows, everyone involved believes *The Sandman* possesses something special. Says Acheampong, "Each episode is different. Just when you think you've worked out what it is, it's not that thing. I think the show will stand out. People's minds are going to be blown, in my humble opinion."

And hearts? Expect to be touched likewise, says Heinberg. "The way I like to talk about *Sandman*, especially for people who may not be fans of fantasy per se, is that *Sandman* at its heart is an emotional drama."

"We've got plenty of world-building, plenty of fantasy," he adds, "but it's actually a very simple story about fathers and sons and brothers and sisters and ex-lovers and people trying to connect and reconnect. Even if you're not a comic-book person, even if you don't know about *Sandman*, I think you'll fall in love with the characters and root for them and feel what they're feeling. I think it's a deeply hopeful, loving experience, which is why it's as powerful as it is. It teaches you how to be human in the most inclusive, loving and joyful way." Sounds like a dream.

THE SANDMAN LAUNCHES ON NETFLIX ON 5 AUGUST.



Stephen Fry plays Gilbert, also known as Fiddler's Green in the comics.

MIDNIGHT OIL

THE RIG Writer David Macpherson on his offshore thriller.

Martin Compston's offshore workplace starts to go bump in the night...



The advice for new writers is always to start off with something small and easy to film, but I heard Charlie Brooker speaking once and he said that was a terrible idea," laughs David Macpherson, who worked for an environmental charity before writing *The Rig* as his debut script. "When you're a new writer, it's the only time you don't have to worry about budgets or other people, and you should just do the thing that you most want to see. This is the story I knew I had to get out of my head."

Growing up in the shadow of an oil rig (literally, as the shipyard that built them towered over his school in Scotland's Cromarty Firth), Macpherson's dad worked offshore and came home full of stories about life on the North Sea. Fuelling his imagination as he grew up obsessed with *Alien*, *The Thing* and *The Abyss*, Macpherson wrote his own sci-fi horror about a group of

'THE RIG IS A THRILL RIDE. WE'VE GOT BIG STUNTS AND BIG HOOKS'

DAVID MACPHERSON

roughnecks forced to deal with *something* together in the middle of nowhere.

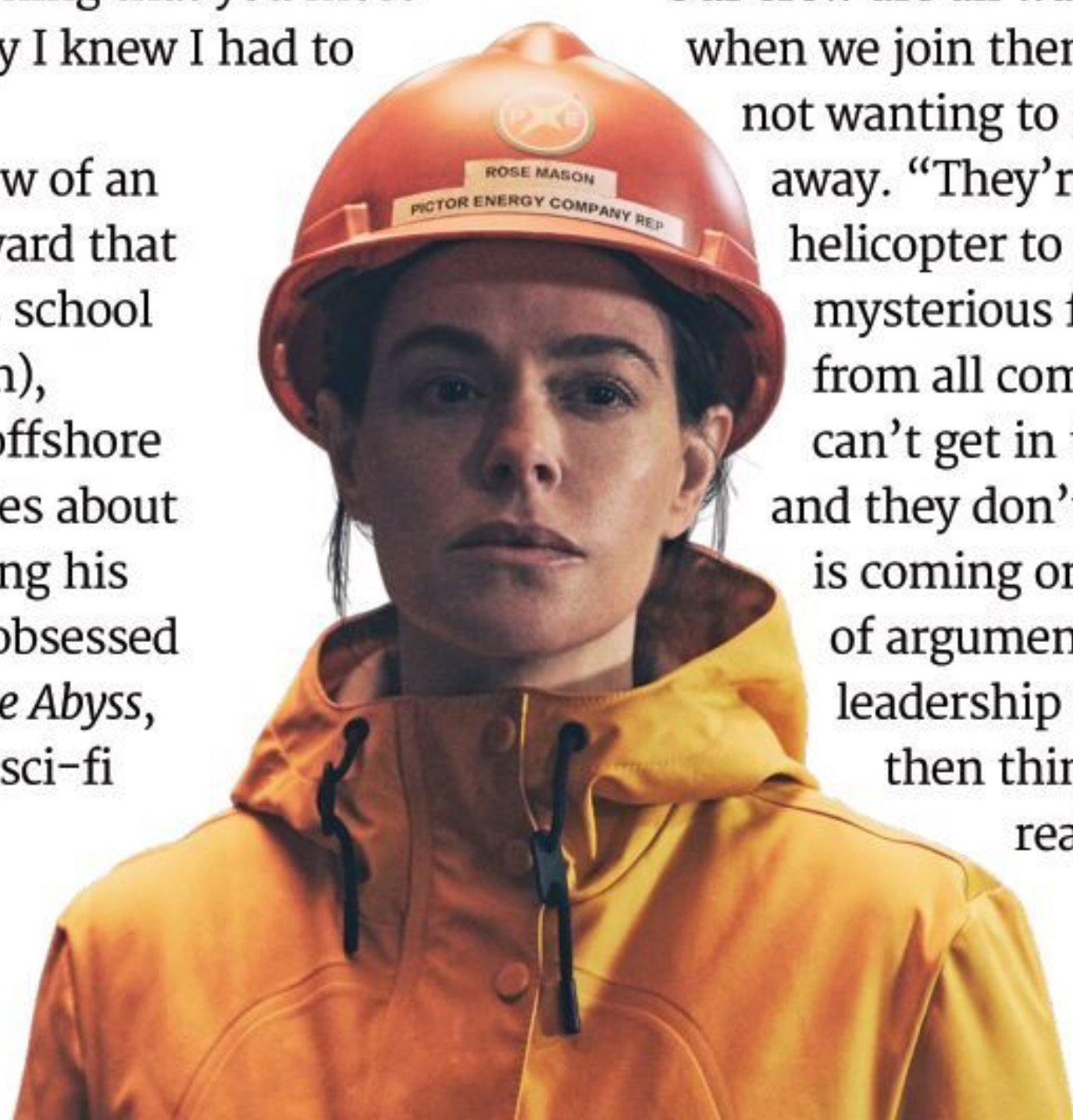
"Our crew are all waiting to go home when we join them," he explains, not wanting to give too much away. "They're waiting for their helicopter to come when a mysterious fog cuts them off from all communication. They can't get in touch with anyone, and they don't even know if help is coming or not. There's lots of arguments and tension and leadership challenges... And then things start getting really, really weird."

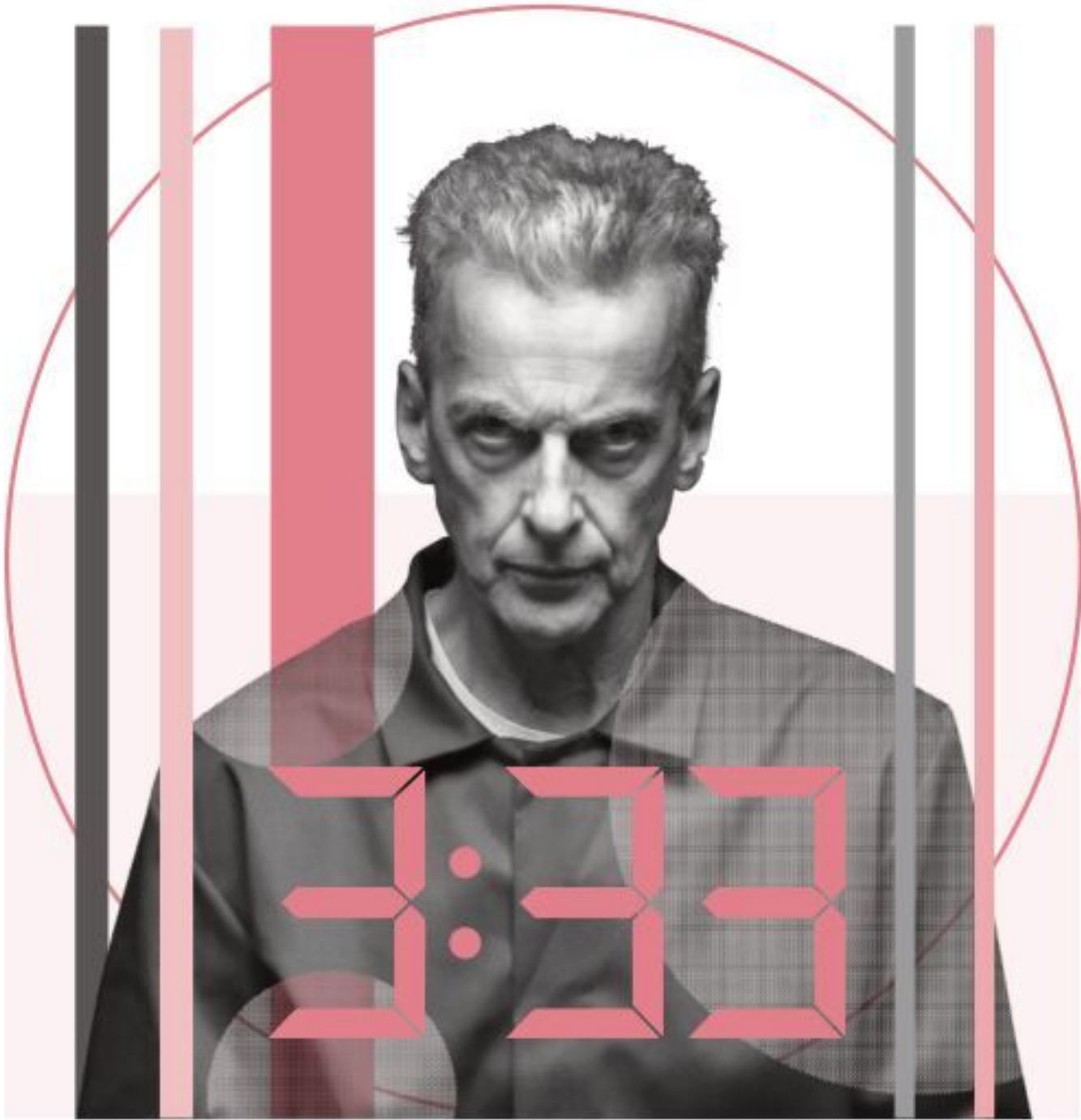
Knowing that he needed audiences to want to spend time trapped with his characters, casting was key. Assembling "the Scottish Avengers", the production hired Iain Glen, Martin Compston, Martin Bonnar and Emun Elliott along with Emily Hampshire and Rochenda Sandall – with all episodes directed by *Line Of Duty* alumnus John Strickland.

"*The Rig* is a thrill ride," says Macpherson. "We've got big stunts and big hooks, and I really want people to get the rollercoaster effect. But I also really wanted to capture the dignity in the work. These are people who spend half their life out on this machine to give us the fuel we all need. It's dangerous. And it's lonely. Being on an oil rig is like being nowhere else in the world and a lot of my friends from school ended up offshore. I was much more of a sit inside and read books and watch *Star Trek* kind of kid, so I hope this does them all proud."

PAUL BRADSHAW

ETA STREAMING LATER THIS YEAR, PRIME VIDEO





TIME BOMB

THE DEVIL'S HOUR Writer Tom Moran on his middle-of-the-night horror story starring Peter Capaldi.

Have you ever woken up at exactly 3.33am? After *The Devil's Hour* comes out, expect alarm clocks to be turned to the wall.

Screenwriter Tom Moran wrote his new six-part thriller to keep audiences up at night – but not in the way you might think. “It’s not a horror, because I wouldn’t be able to watch it,” he laughs. “I don’t think entertainment should ever be cardio, so it’s not the sort of show where you’re constantly tense. I don’t want to shock people or give them nightmares, but hopefully they’ll be up all night still thinking about it.”

Pitched as a “philosophical thriller”, Moran is keen to keep plot details as light as possible: “The idea itself is the mystery, so to talk about what the idea actually is would kind of spoil everything.” Central to everything though is the number 3.33.

“I’ve always been a bit neurotic about numbers,” he says. “If I wake up at 12.34, or 01.01, it’s always slightly unnerved me. But I didn’t know about 3.33 until about six years ago, when I was watching an episode of *Fargo* and there’s this line about ‘the devil’s hour’. I looked into it and found out that the hour between three and four in the morning used to be cursed time.

“At one point, the superstition around it was so intense that you weren’t allowed outside during that time. It’s supposed to be when the threshold between the world of the living and the dead is at its thinnest, when you’re most likely to die.”

Thinking about it too much until he did, eventually, wake up at 3.33, Moran started



‘HOPEFULLY THEY’LL BE UP ALL NIGHT STILL THINKING ABOUT IT’

TOM MORAN

looking into other phenomenon such as coincidence and déjà vu – framing his script around a puzzle-box murder mystery starring Jessica Raine and Peter Capaldi as two characters caught up in a story they can’t quite understand their own role in.

“I don’t want to write a show that has this big mystery at the heart of it and then make you wait years to find out what that is – Episode 6 of Season 1 will answer everything in a big way,” says Moran, referencing the influence of *Breaking Bad* as well as *Lost* and *The Leftovers*.

“The idea just completely consumed me. And then I just had this thing buzzing away in the back of my brain that wouldn’t let go until I got it down on paper.” **PAUL BRADSHAW**

ETA STREAMING LATER THIS YEAR, PRIME VIDEO

THIS ENGLAND

Branagh does Boris...

They say villains are the juiciest parts, so how could Kenneth Branagh resist playing a mop-topped Boris Johnson? Perhaps Branagh's Sator in *Tenet* wasn't such a bad guy after all...

This five-part drama will take us on a labyrinthine journey along the corridors of power as the first wave of the Covid virus hits ("The single best thing any of us can do is wash our hands," advises BJ), with our mumbling, bumbling PM grappling to navigate the pandemic, Brexit and a turbulent personal life. Spliced with shenanigans at the highest levels of government will be action from around the country, as scientists race to understand the virus and create an antidote, and doctors, nurses and care-home workers do battle on the frontlines.

Formerly known as *This Sceptred Isle*, the series is co-written and directed by Michael Winterbottom (*Greed*, *24 Hour Party People*), who's clearly betting on punters' curiosity to get an inside look being a big enough hook to encourage them to relive those harrowing times so soon after. "A new dawn is breaking," promises Johnson in the trailer. "2020 will be a year of prosperity." **JAMIE GRAHAM**

ETA AUTUMN TBC, SKY ATLANTIC/NOW



WRECK

There will be blood...

Set aboard a mega cruise ship, this horror-comedy series follows 19-year-old Jamie (Oscar Kennedy) as he joins the overworked, underpaid, hard-partying crew to get to the bottom of his sister's disappearance on the same vessel's previous tour. A sinister truth awaits, while a slew of murders unleash an ocean of blood. Writer Ryan J. Brown is setting his bar high: "I wanted to create a piece of genre entertainment that had the savvy teen sharpness of *Scream*, the unsettling atmosphere of *The Shining* and the strange upstairs, downstairs mythology of *The Cabin In The Woods*," he says. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

ETA LATER THIS YEAR, BBC THREE



BAD SISTERS

Family misfortunes...

TF is a big fan of Sharon Horgan – she was our Hero in last month's issue – so our excitement is high for this 10-part comedy thriller set between London and Dublin, as the Garvey sisters (Horgan, Anne-Marie Duff, Eva Birthistle, Sarah Greene, Eve Hewson) promise to always protect each other following the death of their parents. Based on the Flemish series *Clan*, *Bad Sisters*, which Horgan also co-wrote and executive produced, features a top support cast that includes Claes Bang, Brian Gleeson and Daryl McCormack, whose career is set to, ahem, rise after playing the charming titular sex worker in *Good Luck To You*, Leo Grande. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

ETA 19 AUGUST, APPLE TV+



WATCH LIST

More for your radar...

Everyone's favourite talking tree gets an animated spin-off in *I Am Groot* (10 August, Disney+)... Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney get into the soccer business in docuseries *Welcome To Wrexham* (25 August, Disney+)... Karate rivals old and new continue to clash in *Cobra Kai S5* (9 September, Netflix)... Warwick Davis is back to conjure up another fantasy adventure in sequel series *Willow* (30 November, Disney+)... Sylvester Stallone is an ageing, out-of-time mobster in Taylor Sheridan's *Tulsa King* (13 November, Paramount+)... Sheridan's all-conquering western saga *Yellowstone* – the biggest TV show you've probably never seen – returns for *S5* (13 Nov, Paramount+)... Psychological thriller *The Patient* (tbc, Disney+) sees Steve Carell's therapist held captive by Domhnall Gleeson's serial killer... *The Handmaid's Tale*, the show that's become synonymous with the battle for women's rights in the US, returns for *S5* (tbc, Channel 4)... Netflix's horror king Mike Flanagan returns for more small-screen spookiness in *The Midnight Club* (tbc, Netflix)... Playwriting titan Jez Butterworth (*Jerusalem*) is behind secretive series *Mammals*, starring James Corden (tbc, Prime Video)... Cult appeal beckons for novel adap *Fleishman Is In Trouble* (tbc, Disney+), starring Jesse Eisenberg and Claire Danes... A mother (Aubrey Plaza) faces a custody battle with Satan (Danny DeVito) in bonkers-sounding animation *Little Demon* (tbc, Disney+)... Jeff Bridges is a geriatric John Wick (sort of) in hitman thriller *The Old Man* (tbc, Disney+)... Guillermo del Toro's *Cabinet Of Curiosities* (tbc, Netflix) sees the horror maestro overseeing an incredible line-up of directing talent.



FIVE DAYS AT MEMORIAL

Emergency services...

If you like your drama to hit hard and leave scars, this eight-part series is for you. Based on real events and adapted from the book by Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist Sheri Fink, *Five Days At Memorial* trains a lens on an intensive care unit of a New Orleans hospital during Hurricane Katrina. Floodwaters rise, power fails and staff are forced to make life-and-death decisions. Written by Oscar-winner John Ridley (*12 Years A Slave*) and Emmy winner Carlton Cuse (*Lost*), this intense drama was shot in New Orleans and Toronto, with its large ensemble cast headed up by Vera Farmiga, Cornelius Smith Jr. and Adepero Oduye. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

ETA 12 AUGUST, APPLE TV+

SAS: ROGUE HEROES

Men on a mission...

With *Peaky Blinders* concluding earlier this year, it's time to embrace creator Steven Knight's new creation – SAS: Rogue Heroes, a six-part drama charting how the SAS was formed and surged into action.

Based on Ben Macintyre's book, the drama is set against the backdrop of the North African Campaign, promising high tension and large-scale set-pieces as viewers are dropped into Cairo, 1941, with officer David Stirling (Connor Swindells) persuading his superiors to allow him to recruit the toughest, bravest and brightest soldiers into a unit that will infiltrate enemy territory to cause havoc.

The psychological makeup and interpersonal dynamics of these bold and, yes, reckless men will be explored as they bring their particular set of skills to bear.

Knight says the unit "used wit and imagination as much as firepower to halt the march of fascism across North Africa during the darkest days of World War 2. This is a war story like no other, told in a way that is once inspired by the facts and true to the spirit of this legendary brigade of misfits and adventurers."

JAMIE GRAHAM

ETA LATER THIS YEAR, BBC ONE/IPLAYER



Alfie Allen, Connor Swindells and Jack O'Connell take to the skies in *SAS: Rogue Heroes*.

The



Invisible

A chameleonic character actor who can do it all, George MacKay has rarely hewn a predictable path through the film industry. And now he's taking one of his biggest swings yet, as a crusading graffiti artist in Babak Anvari's volatile Brit thriller *I CAME BY*. Total Film meets a restless performer who can't be pinned down.

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY PORTRAIT NICK THOMPSON

Man



SPOTLIGHT

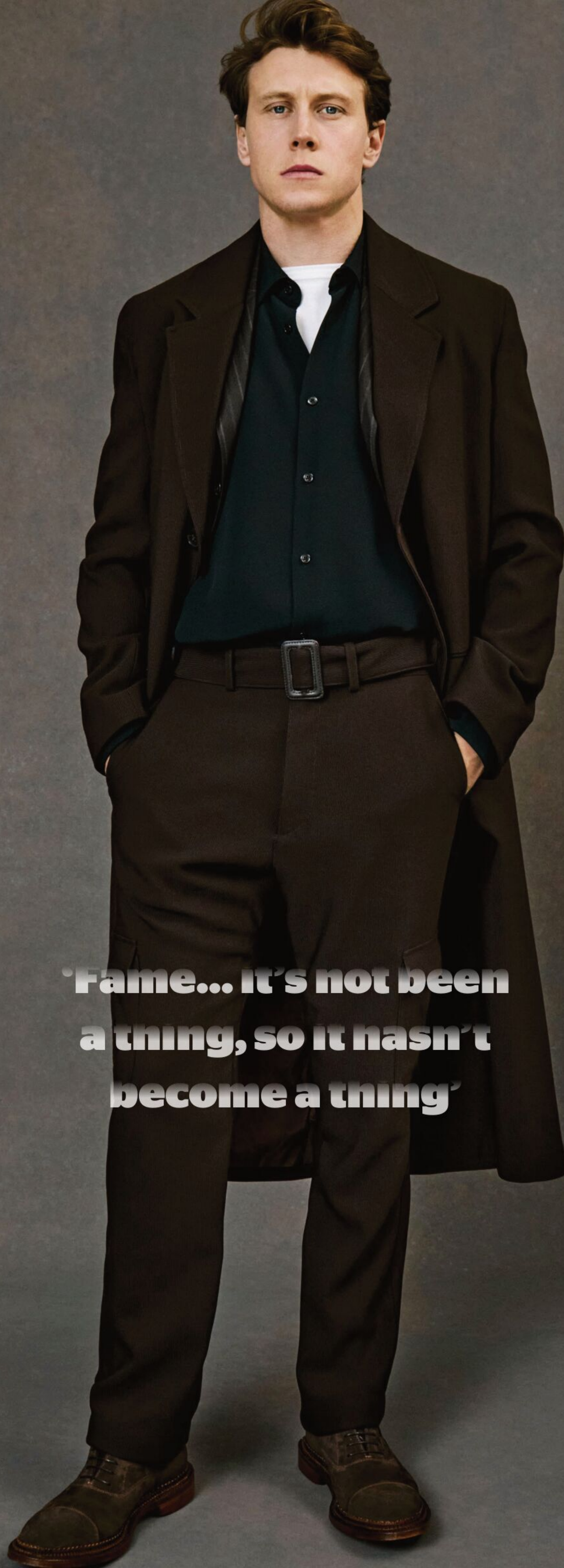
Some actors want to be movie stars – name in neon lights, red-carpet premieres on every continent, a seven-picture superhero deal. Not George MacKay. Over a near-20-year career, the London-born star of 1917, *True History Of The Kelly Gang* and the upcoming Netflix crime thriller *I Came By* has made a virtue of his relative anonymity given his leading-man status. “At the end of the day, if you want to be a chameleon there is a level of not knowing required,” MacKay tells *TF*. “Fame... it’s not been a thing, so it hasn’t become a thing.”

Whether by design or by chance (“Maybe a bit of both,” he chuckles) MacKay isn’t the kind of actor to rack up column inches, or make a commodity of a larger-than-life persona. He doesn’t even have the requisite Instagram account. Instead he’s content to let the work do the talking, and when you’re a shapeshifter as adept as MacKay, the capacity to disappear is an invaluable commodity. The irony is that, over two decades, the prolific 30-year-old performer has rarely disappeared from screens for any significant amount of time, habitually appearing in multiple TV and film projects every year.

As we speak, the typically busy and unfailingly cordial MacKay is being driven back from the set of his latest gig, a revenge-romance called *Femme*, directed by first-time feature filmmakers Sam Freeman and Ng Choon Ping. It’s one of four projects in the pipeline – among them Shane Meadows’ return to TV with *The Gallows Pole*, a Golden Age-style musical directed by acclaimed documentarian Joshua Oppenheimer, and a near-future sci-fi co-starring Léa Seydoux. If you’re looking for a through-line – the cynical career stepping stones that will take MacKay to the next level – there isn’t one, save for MacKay’s belief in the stories being told, “because everything falls beneath that”, and the filmmakers telling them.

It was this exact criteria that led him to *I Came By*. The third feature from British-Iranian writer/director Babak Anvari, it stars MacKay as Toby, a London-based graffiti-writer who breaks into the homes of the city’s wealthy elite, and emblazons their walls with the eponymous insignia. The message loud and clear: you are being watched. But Toby’s unconventional crusade puts himself and those around him in mortal danger when he breaks into the home of Hugh Bonneville’s retired judge and discovers that the entrenched establishment figure is concealing a criminal past. “It was such a fantastic script that Babak and Namsi Khan had written,” MacKay gushes. “[Babak] explained how this was a passion project of his, and an idea since film school, as well as the Hitchcock-thriller aspect of it. Everything he was saying, it was like: ‘Yes, yes, yes!’”

Toby, however, is not your typical movie hero. A generous person might describe him as ‘abrasive’, but to put it in plain English: he’s a bit of a dick. Furiously angry at the



**‘Fame... it’s not been
a thing, so it hasn’t
become a thing’**

rampant inequality he sees around him, and motivated to do something about it, Toby's rage blinds him to how much of a hard time he's giving his mother (Kelly Macdonald) and best friend Jay (Percelle Ascott). "So often we filter ourselves," MacKay explains. "To play someone who's making a point of not being filtered... he's just a real joy."

Backed by Anvari, MacKay relished the opportunity to play a character "turned up to 11", but saw in Toby hidden depths that belie his angry-young-man bluster. "In some sense, there's a fair bit of bravado to him. But he's kind of true to his word," MacKay says. "You've got someone who's shouting about integrity to a point which feels slightly thin, but he ends up going for it. That's the joy of playing characters. You can almost be braver than you would about certain things in your own life, because you get to do it through them."

FINDING NEVERLAND

Not that MacKay's life is lacking in gutsy leaps of faith. Born in Hammersmith to craftspeople parents, MacKay was plucked from obscurity while still at primary school by a scout seeking young actors to fill the ranks of the Lost Boys in P.J. Hogan's 2003 adaptation of *Peter Pan*, which was filming on the Gold Coast of Australia. Through a family friend MacKay found an agent, but one that worked exclusively with adults; MacKay, aged 10 at the time, was the sole exception. As a result, instead of chasing roles on CBBC shows, MacKay was put up for the child roles within adult productions, leading to early appearances alongside Daniel Craig (in *Defiance*), Chiwetel Ejiofor and Toni Collette (in miniseries *Tsunami: The Aftermath*). "That gave me experiences I was lucky to have," MacKay says. "And set me on a path in terms of a taste in work."

After working consistently in his teens MacKay applied and, somewhat absurdly, failed to get into drama school at 17. Neither did a *Potter*-level mega-franchise come his way, despite the series' ubiquity in the UK film industry at the time – a blessing in disguise that meant instead of a fast track to success, MacKay was given the space to grow organically as an actor. "I feel very grateful that I got to be quite gradual, which then makes you feel more stable later on," MacKay notes. "I was learning by osmosis without thinking too much. I now think a lot about it. It can get quite heavy!"

Thoughtful but refreshingly self-aware ("I'm weary of sounding wanky," is a refrain deployed more than once), MacKay's enthusiasm for his vocation is palpable. Ask him why he makes films and he launches into a typically reflective anecdote. "I remember Sam Mendes talking about it when we were doing press for *1917*," MacKay recalls. "Someone asked him 'What does it mean? Why make this?' He kind of took a pause, and said, 'I'm not trying to say what it is. I'm just trying to offer something up, for you to figure

it out.' You offer an experience. For some of these experiences it might be very clear to the audience what that is, and for some people, it won't be, and that, in itself, is the point."

In recent years, MacKay has become known for a series of physically demanding, often wildly transformative roles. For *1917*'s 'Schofield Run' the actor spent two days filming a 300-metre sprint through practical explosions and 500 extras – an unscripted collision even made it into the finished film. *True History Of The Kelly Gang* director Justin Kurzel gave MacKay an extensive 'to-do' list ahead of playing one of history's most famous Australians, including a picture of a sinewy rock climber with a note: "This is what I want your back to look like." And for Nathalie Biancheri's *Wolf*, MacKay trained with famed movement coach Terry Notary to play a man who believes he's a wolf, spending the early days of lockdown crawling around Hampstead Heath on all fours.

"It feels almost as essential as learning your lines for certain characters," MacKay says of his sometimes intense physical preparations. "It's the costume underneath the costume. It really does root you to it, in some ways." Just don't call him a Method actor. "To be honest, that's the kind you've got to be careful with, because sometimes you're doing things that are slightly irrelevant. But I think that surface-level appearances aren't to be sniffed at, as long as they're shored up by what's going on underneath and inside."

TEAM PLAYER

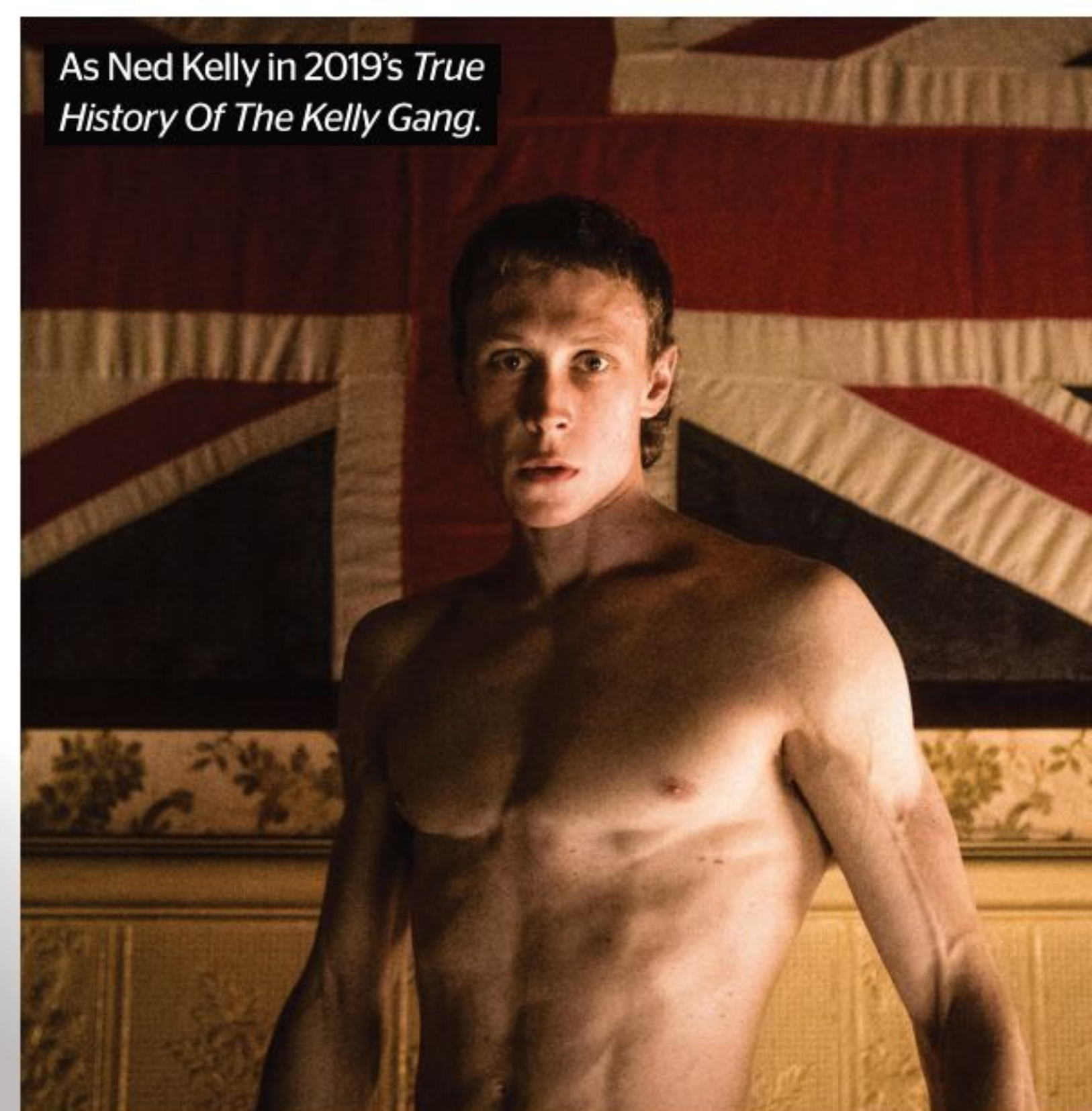
Giving his characters rich internal lives is something MacKay has never had a problem with. A soulful and emotionally articulate performer, MacKay doesn't so much shun the movie-star spotlight as redirect it to those around him at every given opportunity. "I don't think of myself as the lead element in [*1917* or *True History Of The Kelly Gang*]," he states, counterintuitively. "It's about perception. I'm just in those ones a bit more, you know? It really is that. It's just sort of screen time, basically." On *I Came By*, the film's slippery, constantly shifting focus means that MacKay doesn't see Toby as the central character, but "the first member of the relay" – a role that he was happy to embrace.

"Everyone is facilitating a story that you believe in, rather than facilitating yourself. That's the ethics within this story, so it's almost integral to explore that through an ensemble," says MacKay, suddenly arriving home at almost 9pm, with a 7.25am pickup scheduled for the following morning. "That said, I do really love being on. I love just being there. If I'm there to work, I want to work." And with that, he's gone. Another great disappearing act.

I CAME BY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 AUGUST AND STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 31 AUGUST.



With Percelle Ascott in the upcoming *I Came By*.



As Ned Kelly in 2019's *True History Of The Kelly Gang*.



MacKay playing Lance Corporal Schofield in *1917*.



A Predator is shown in a dark, swampy environment, partially obscured by large, dark, veined leaves. The Predator's face is visible in the upper right, looking down. The background is a murky, blue-green swamp with some light reflecting off the water.

IF IT BLEEDS SHE CAN KILL IT

The ugliest motherf*er in movies is back for a stripped-down prequel pitting a new breed of Predator against a resourceful Comanche warrior in the early 18th century. Director Dan Trachtenberg and star Amber Midthunder tell Total Film about **Prey**, their quietly groundbreaking, franchise-reviving David and Goliath story.**

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY

o one forgets the first time they come face to face with a Predator. For Amber Midthunder, the 25-year-old star of *Prey*, the moment came a few days into production on the film's Calgary location shoot, when she stumbled on a lighting and costume test in the woods so secretive even she wasn't aware what was happening. "There was a humming, and I saw a big group of people," Midthunder says, regaling *TF* over Zoom from her home in California. "I walked further, and then I saw [*the Predator*]. I was lasered in. The first thing I said was: 'I can take it.' And then I got in my regular brain, and I was like, 'That's terrifying!' But the first thing that came out of my mouth was: 'I can take it.'"

Midthunder's confidence in the moment – misguided or otherwise – spoke to the mettle of her character, young Comanche hunter Naru. As an indigenous woman, Naru represents something radically different for the *Predator* series, which has traditionally put all-American men with biceps the size of basketballs in the extraterrestrial hunter's tri-laser crosshairs. "I believe it's the first time there's been an indigenous female protagonist in an action movie ever," Midthunder grins. "That is historic, and an extremely big deal."

For director and co-writer Dan Trachtenberg, the idea to drop a Predator into the middle of a Native American tribe dates back to his earliest encounter with John McTiernan's '87 action classic. Too young to have seen the film in cinemas, his imagination was ignited by secondhand whispers. "I have this distinct memory of being on my way to a karate tournament in a minivan, and all of the sixth-graders had just seen [*Predator*]," recalls Trachtenberg, a third

grader (eight-nine years old) at the time. "They spent the whole trip describing the entire movie to me. And they described this moment where Billy, the Native American tracker, stays behind on a bridge over a waterfall, and fights the Predator. I saw that scene in my head. And then when I saw the movie, and that scene is not in the movie, there was the moment where I was like, 'Oh, what's that movie?'"

"Spiritually", Trachtenberg says, he's wanted to direct a Predator movie since that day. After percolating the idea for almost 30 years, a pipe dream became a potential reality when his feature debut – 2016's surprise sci-fi sequel *10 Cloverfield Lane* – turned him into an in-demand filmmaker overnight. With freshly earned chips to cash, one of his first moves was to turn to a pre-Disney-merger Fox and pitch his Predator idea. The one hitch was that Shane Black's ill-fated *The Predator* was about to go into production. Even still, the timing proved fortuitous. "This idea felt so separate to that," Trachtenberg says. "And because *Star Wars* was going 'Here's *Rogue One* and *Solo*' while the main trilogies [*were being made*], they felt that this could happen."

The frosty reception to *The Predator* and, more importantly, the Disney-Fox merger, meant *Prey* was put on the back-burner for a few years, eventually re-emerging from stasis in late 2019. At the time, years after getting the



'I BELIEVE IT'S THE FIRST TIME THERE'S BEEN AN INDIGENOUS FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN AN ACTION MOVIE EVER. THAT IS HISTORIC'



Originally hoping to prove herself as a hunter, Naru quickly becomes the hunted.

Amber Midthunder plays Comanche hunter Naru.

mainline *Predator* film at the newly rebranded 20th Century Studios. But the secret was still under wraps when the search began in earnest to find an actor who could embody Naru. “I first auditioned for this movie in February of 2020 and I had no idea what it was,” says Midthunder. “It was a ‘period-piece’, but I was confused about why they were talking the way they were talking. I was like, ‘I don’t understand what kind of movie this is.’”

Midthunder’s confusion was understandable – after all *Predator* is one of the great genre-benders in movie history, taking a hard swerve from gleefully OTT macho action (“I ain’t got time to bleed”) into dread-fuelled sci-fi horror as Dutch and his paramilitary rescue squad are mercilessly picked off by an alien creature with insurmountable physical and technological superiority. Over the years the series would lose its way as it doubled down on action, culminating in a pair of poorly received *Alien* crossovers (whoever won, we lost) and Shane Black’s promising but critically compromised return to the *Predator*-verse after starring as Hawkins in the original film. With *Prey*, Trachtenberg is embracing the tried and tested genre-

blending formula, while putting his own spin on the series.

FIGHTING FIT

“There was this notion of getting back to a very slimmed-down, pure story, something that was much more elemental, and embracing – perhaps even more so than the original – the ‘David versus Goliath’ quality,” says Trachtenberg, sporting a Weyland-Yutani baseball cap (“It’s all one shared happy universe, you know?”) while talking to *TF* over Zoom. “The exciting thing about this movie is that it’s really much more of an adventure than horror; it’s much more intense and suspenseful, I think, than [*the Predator films*] have been for quite some time. And not to mention the biggest thing, which is focusing on a protagonist that we have never seen before...”

Underestimated even by her own tribe, Naru’s desire to be a hunter-gatherer who can provide for her people puts her in the path of a predator much deadlier than wolves and brown bears. Describing Naru as “stubborn, strong-minded, but also very human”, Midthunder and her co-stars underwent a four-week boot-camp on location where weapons training – “Spears, archery, tomahawks...” she lists, nonchalantly – was top of the to-do list. But even that scarcely prepared Midthunder for the gruelling physical demands of a film shot “almost entirely” on location in the Canadian wilderness.

“I read this script, and I still somehow didn’t understand in my brain what it would actually be like to do,” says Midthunder, who filmed one key scene glimpsed in the trailer in a real river. “To me, going into a live river is so scary. It was summertime in Calgary, but the water was glacial runoff from the mountains. It was glacial water!”

Though not Comanche herself – she’s a member of the Fort Peck Sioux Tribe – Midthunder was continually impressed by the production’s commitment to respectful indigenous representation, which started with the hiring of producer Jhane Myers, a Comanche and Blackfeet American Indian. “To have the people who actually can make change be so open to learning, and to care, and to ask questions was really amazing,” says Midthunder. When the film arrives on Disney+ next month, there will be an option to stream with Comanche subtitles. “We did an early screening in Oklahoma at the Comanche Nation, just to see how that community felt about our movie. And that came from a ➡➡

green light, next to nothing was known publicly about the film – then going by the codename ‘Skulls’ – especially the fact that it was a *Predator* film. This was no accident, with Trachtenberg outlining a plan to emulate the mystery-box marketing strategy that J.J. Abrams successfully applied to the *Cloverfield* films in his earliest emails to Fox executives.

TRADE SECRETS

“The plan that I laid out,” Trachtenberg explains, “was that there could be a trailer about Naru going out there to prove herself, and being on a hunt, and trying to survive on her own, and looking up at the sky, and seeing a fire, and that being it – without a title. It’d feel more like a Shyamalan thing, or a Jordan Peele thing, like: ‘What the heck is going on with this movie?’ And then we would release a second part, which would be the bear being lifted up by the Predator. And that would have been the reveal. But so many things changed that didn’t allow that to happen.”

Word eventually got out in November 2020 when the *American* trades reported that Trachtenberg was helming the fifth



Former basketball player Dane DiLiegro takes on the role of the Predator.

PREDATOR VERSUS...

Some of the Yautja's adversaries over the years.

XENOMORPHS

In what should've been a crossover to rival Spider-Man joining the MCU, the two *AvP* films were massive disappointments, with sequel *Requiem* (2007) somehow worse than the 2004 original. Inspired in part by the comics that preceded them, the films have been largely forgotten as a blemish on both sci-fi franchises.



JACK THE RIPPER

In '97/'98 comic-book series, *Predator: Nemesis*, the ugly MF descended on Victorian London for a killing spree that gets attributed to 'Spring-heeled Jack'. Military captain Edward Soames is familiar with the creature from his time in the British Raj, and crossover potential is teased with the inclusion of Mycroft Holmes.

THE MOB

In 2005 videogame, *Predator: Concrete Jungle*, the master hunter (later named 'Scarface') briefly lands in mob-ruled 1930s New York City, before being exiled and returning to the Neonopolis of the future, where he must reclaim the Yautjas' appropriated tech for a shot at redemption. Links to Weyland-Yutani abound.

MORTAL KOMBAT

The dreadlocked badass was an unlockable character in *Mortal Kombat X*, the 10th instalment in the videogame beat-'em-up series. Hard not to feel intimidated by the pre-fight stealth invisibility and heat vision, and the wrist blades and plasmacaster make for pretty definitive finishing moves.



PIRATES

In comic short *Predator: 1718*, a Predator sides with a pirate captain facing a mutiny. The dying Captain Andolini gifts the creature his flintlock pistol (and yes, the antique piece shows up in *Predator 2* when it's handed to Danny Glover's Harrigan). **MM**



Dakota Beavers plays fellow Comanche Taabe.

➡ conversation that I had with Dan. So they were very clearly and genuinely being considerate, and open to the voices of the people."

So absorbing were the film's early Comanche camp sequences that "there were a lot of times I forgot the Predator was involved," says Midthunder, who stars primarily alongside newcomer Dakota Beavers as Taabe. "And then sometimes that thing would be there, and I would be like, 'Oh, right. Of course. We belong to something bigger.'"

Bigger to the tune of at least 6'8" – the height of former pro basketball player turned actor Dane DiLiegro, who plays the film's 'Feral Predator', as this particular Yautja was known on set. Trachtenberg and screenwriter Patrick Aison created an interesting quandary for themselves by setting their story some 300 years before our first introduction to the sport-hunting species in the late '80s – what does a less advanced Predator, but one still possessing a significant technological advantage over its prey, look like?

"We certainly spoke of the conundrum of this quite a bit," Trachtenberg says. "The challenge was: how do we make this Predator feel like its technology is a little bit older, but also making sure that we don't interfere with the power of the premise of this movie, which is that it's so far advanced from anything that we have on Earth, technologically speaking, that it feels like the challenge is there?"

LOCK 'N' LOAD

First on the chopping block was the iconic shoulder-mounted plasmacaster – an instant-win weapon, according to Trachtenberg. But it wasn't simply a case of technological downgrades. The Feral Predator, glimpsed fleetingly in the trailer, is visually distinct from any previously seen on screen. "The aesthetic of this Predator is different



Midthunder endured weeks of intensive weapons training for the role.



'I WANTED TO SEE THE SINEWS OF THIS CREATURE, AND FEEL THAT IT'S ALIEN'

enough that it feels like it might be from a distant part of the same planet," Trachtenberg explains. "Or a different breed, and they might have some different gadgetry or weaponry."

Some of the Feral Predator's new tech – including a nifty retractable shield inspired by the 2018 *God Of War* videogame – derived from a desire to take the Predator back to the lean, agile stalker of the first film as opposed to the heavily armoured walking tanks of later movies. "I really wanted to get away from that feeling that there's a

professional wrestler moving around in a rubber suit," Trachtenberg says with a chuckle. "So the design of the creature is much more slimmed down. I wanted to see the sinews of this creature, and feel that it's alien, and I didn't want to cover it up with gladiatorial armour. He's still huge, but it's more of a swimmer's body and much more creature-like in the way he looks and moves."

As well as drawing out elements of the Predator only "teased in the visuals of the original movie", Trachtenberg also turned to the Dark Horse Comics – a beloved part of his childhood – for deep-cut callbacks aimed at the Predator faithful. And while the director and his team opted against breaking down the original film frame-by-frame to divine the secrets of its success, in order to prevent it interfering with their "creativity", they did find McTiernan's film inevitably looming large.

"There are things that are similar to the first movie, some by design, and others that I realised: 'Oh my God, this is the original. I didn't even mean to do that,'" Trachtenberg says. "We were faced with the same dramatic issues that movie faced, and we ended up with a similar response to it. And now it's an Easter egg in the movie. Maybe at the later junkets for this, I'll claim, 'Yep, that was my intention the whole time!'"

LOOKING FORWARD

If Trachtenberg's intentions come good, *Prey* could be the film that revives

a flatlining franchise with potential largely untapped in 35 years of screen sequels and spin-offs. For *Midthunder*, at least, the glacial dips and forest frights proved more than worth it. "I've seen it twice," the actor beams. "The first time it was pure shock and awe. And then the second time, when we took it to the Comanche Nation, it was a lot of excitement and pride and satisfaction."

Inadvertently or not, Trachtenberg has also hit on the perfect anthology format for the series – drop a Predator into different warrior cultures across history, sit back and watch the fireworks. Having finally scratched the itch that formed en route to that fateful karate tournament the question is, where next?

"That's a thing that I imagine lots of people will start to fantasise about, the way that we were kids reading superhero comic-books and fantasising about: 'What if the Hulk fought...'" Trachtenberg smiles, barely keeping his excitement in check. "Because we have yet to really draw out what might be next for the franchise, I wouldn't want to go out on a limb. But I will say that the earliest, earliest, earliest bits of discussion could potentially be something that is as bold a swing as this movie is."

Hunting season is officially open.

PREY STREAMS UNDER THE STAR BANNER ON DISNEY+ FROM 5 AUGUST.



The 'Feral Predator' sees the Yautja's aesthetic return to its more slimline roots.



FARTONWELL FLESH

Featuring living beds, mutating organs and avant-garde surgeries, twisted body horror **Crimes Of The Future** marks a welcome return to screens for **David Cronenberg**. **Total Film** dives into one of his most provocative films to date, as he prophesies the shape of things to come.

WORDS
JAMES
MOTTRAM

“ong live the new flesh.” Words that, as any David Cronenberg fan will know, were spoken at the very end of *Videodrome*, his 1983 cult hit about the mind-and-body altering power of television. Words, also, that could apply to his latest film, *Crimes Of The Future*, which sees the Canadian back behind the camera after an all-too-long eight-year hiatus. The “new flesh” – the metamorphosis of our bodies into something more advanced, more poisonous perhaps – is embedded in his entire work. Or as the 79-year-old director now puts it: “The human condition is the human body.”

After his last film, the satire *Maps To The Stars*, Cronenberg sidestepped into novel-writing with 2014’s *Consumed*, a story that saw him tackle strange sexual fetishes and technology run amok. *Crimes...* continues this re-embracing of such perennial topics. Even the title takes him back to his 1970 underground short of the same name, about cosmetics causing a deadly plague – a phrase that he first encountered in the 1966 Danish film *Sult* about a starving ➤➤

➤ poet who, at one point, scribbles ‘Crimes of the Future’ on a notepad. The script for *Crimes...* was written around 1998–99, just as he prepared to release *eXistenZ*. Then under a different title, *Painkillers*, Cronenberg compared it to his 1996 J.G. Ballard adaptation *Crash*. “To the extent that *Crash* is not very Hollywood, I’d say that *Painkillers* will not be very Hollywood either,” he told *Total Film* many years ago. “Although I’d say that technically you could call *Painkillers* a sci-fi movie.” Nicolas Cage was attached, then dropped out. Ralph Fiennes, who worked with Cronenberg on 2002’s *Spider*, later stepped in – but, again, the project stalled.

FUTURE SHOCKS

“I’ve never understood why it’s usually so difficult for him to raise the money, whereas other directors who’ve been around a long time, if they want to direct a movie every year they can,” remarks Viggo Mortensen, who first acted for Cronenberg in 2005’s *A History Of Violence* and now takes the lead in *Crimes...* “Maybe it’s because he’s more particular about the stories he tells. He challenges himself and he does unexpected things.”

Ultimately, it was Robert Lantos, his producer since *Crash*, who urged him to take another look at the screenplay. “It was like reading a script by somebody else,” says Cronenberg. “It was like a script that somebody else wrote. A good one, I thought!” He’s being modest, of course, not least because *Crimes...* has become more prophetic over the intervening years. Set in the near future, in a post-industrial landscape, it’s a world ruled by so-called Accelerated Evolution Syndrome. Human organs are mutating as mankind is merging with its synthetic surroundings. Pain has been all but eradicated.

At the core of the film is Saul Tenser (Mortensen), an extreme performance artist who uses his own ever-changing bodily organs as part of his shows. With the help of his partner Caprice (Léa Seydoux), a former trauma surgeon, these new growths are being removed from his body live on stage. “Surgery is the new sex,” says the mousy Timlin (Kristen Stewart), a member of the government-sponsored National Organ Registry, who show an unhealthy interest in Tenser’s activities.

Already, critics have made comparisons with the US Supreme Court’s recent overruling of *Roe v. Wade*, regarding a pregnant woman’s right to an abortion. “I did write it 20 years ago, but even then you could feel that this was coming,” says



David Cronenberg and Viggo Mortensen with some of Cronenberg's trademark body-inspired technology.

Cronenberg. “An oppressive ownership of [the body] and control. It’s a constant in history, that somewhere in the world, there’s some government that wants to control its population. Body is reality. What do you control? You control people’s bodies. That includes speaking, that includes expressing yourself, that includes your brain.”

As Stewart puts it, “This script happens to be so relevant and poignant right now. I’m shocked that it wasn’t written yesterday. He doesn’t spare you and it’s so deeply thoughtful. Disturbing but also stunning.” The actress’ first ever Cronenberg viewing was *Crash* (“I was probably too young to watch it, but I’m really glad that I did”), but the script for *Crimes...* baffled her. When she and the director first spoke on the phone, “I was like, ‘I have no idea what this movie is about. But I’m so curious. Maybe making this movie we can figure it out.’” For Cronenberg, *Crimes...* is “not overtly political”; rather, it’s a more philosophical look at



Léa Seydoux plays former surgeon Caprice, working with Viggo Mortensen's performance artist Saul Tenser.



Kristen Stewart takes a closer look inside Viggo Mortensen.

human evolution. On set in Athens – the film was shot in and around the ancient Greek capital, a deliciously perverse choice for a futuristic noir – Mortensen remembers Cronenberg muttering a Latin phrase “over and over” to himself. “I realised he was quoting Sigmund Freud [the founder of psychoanalysis, whom the actor played in Cronenberg’s 2011 film *A Dangerous Method*]. He said, ‘Si vis vitam, para mortem’ – ‘If you want to live, prepare to die’ – and I was like, ‘Holy shit!’”

Joining Mortensen, Seydoux and Scott Speedman, who plays Lang Dotrice, another vital cog in this bizarro world, Stewart’s befuddlement at the script didn’t alleviate during the shoot. “We spent every single day after work, all the actors, being like, ‘What the fuck are we doing?’” she chuckles. So how would the creator describe it? “*Crimes Of The Future* is about the crimes committed by the human body against itself,” he says, simply – whether it’s of a surgical, psychological or ecological nature.

‘CRIMES OF THE FUTURE IS ABOUT THE CRIMES COMMITTED BY THE HUMAN BODY AGAINST ITSELF’
DAVID CRONENBERG

The opening sees an eight-year-old boy consuming a plastic rubbish bin – a nod to the increasing reports that microplastics are entering our bodies. “Twenty years ago, nobody was talking about microplastics,” says Cronenberg. “And now every five days you have another microplastics revelation... the awareness that about 80 per cent of the people on Earth have microplastics as part of their flesh.” The director calls the idea of eating plastics “a satirical suggestion”, in the vein of Jonathan Swift, the 18th-century writer, whose essay *A Modest Proposal* put forward that the poor sell their children as food to the wealthy.

“Instead of thinking that to save the Earth, we stop production of plastics, clean the plastics out of the ocean, clean the microplastics out of the bodies of billions and billions of people... because that doesn’t seem very possible... the alternative is that we embrace plastic, that we love it, we enjoy it, we eat it, we find a way to use it as food. It would solve the problems of famine all around the world.” Ironically, Cronenberg’s idea is not so far from the truth, with scientists currently working on “edible plastic” that can already be consumed by single-cell organisms.

FLESH AND FANTASY

Where fans will delight is the return to the icky body horror of his earlier work. Here, machinery intersects with the body, with a dazzling array of devices. Like the Breakfast chair that helps feed Tenser every morning. Or the OrchidBed, a shell-like construction that cocoons him, its tentacles plugged into his torso to monitor the growth of his organs (recalling the rubbery ‘UmbyCords’ that jack into the VR-game players in *eXistenZ*).

“It’s always the body that is the centre of these things for me, and that

is because it’s easy to lose sight of what we are physically,” says Cronenberg. In his mind, “technology is the human body”, and so the tech in his films “tends to be very body-based, looks very organic, looks very physical, looks like it grew from cells”. Once again, he collaborated on these with Carol Spier, the Canadian production designer who has worked on nearly every Cronenberg movie since 1979 drag racing tale *Fast Company*. The film’s unique look included Tenser’s bunker-like apartment, its curved walls inspired by a photo Spier saw of the interior of a cello.

While Mortensen and Don McKellar (who previously featured in *eXistenZ* and here plays Timlin’s colleague Wippet) were veterans of the Cronenberg method, many weren’t. “He’s such a kind, gentle, intuitive, really just wonderful man,” says Stewart. “I was not surprised by that. I really loved being directed by him. It was a real pleasure.” She recalls just how “tickled” he’d be on set as he listened to her and the others reciting his dialogue. “We’re talking about some pretty fucked-up shit... but he loves it!”

“Fucked-up shit” is about right. When the film bowed in Cannes back in May, there were walk-outs at the premiere within the first five minutes – that poor lad who eats plastic is then suffocated by his despairing mother. Other twisted moments include a live autopsy and a scene involving Seydoux’s character and an open wound (right up there with the leg-wound penetration scene in *Crash*). Stewart simply shrugs: “It just never repulses me ever.”

For all this adulation, even in Cannes, Cronenberg has only ever won a Jury Special Prize for *Crash* – and he’s never been nominated for an Oscar. Yet in many ways, just as *Crimes...* is too cerebral for the mainstream, so Cronenberg is too outré for such conventional offerings. Much better would be the industry embracing his risky material.

Already, he’s pushing for his next project, *The Shrouds* to get made, starring another veteran of his films, Vincent Cassel, as a businessman who communes with the dead. Shooting is set to commence next March, just as he turns 80. “I have less of a future than I had before,” he jokes, but he seems revitalised after his time away from filmmaking. “I hope to commit a few more cinematic crimes before I’m finished. Let’s leave it at that.”

CRIMES OF THE FUTURE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 9 SEPTEMBER.

JUST D

Writer/director John Michael McDonagh turns his misanthropic lens on wealthy westerners forced into atonement for their fatal nonchalance amid Morocco's sand dunes in **The Forgiven**. McDonagh and his stars, Ralph Fiennes and Jessica Chastain, tell Total Film why we're still fascinated by cinema's terrible people.

WORDS JANE CROWTHER



ESSENTIALS



They were careless people... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.” So wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925’s *The Great Gatsby* of his monied characters, and in John Michael McDonagh’s adaptation of Lawrence Osborne’s 2012 bestselling novel, it seems little has changed in the intervening decades for the two-percenters at the heart of his lean – and mean – thriller.

Following an affluent married couple, David and Jo Henninger (Ralph Fiennes and Jessica Chastain) as they drive – sozzled – from Casablanca to Azner to attend an opulent weekend party, *The Forgiven* charts the emotional and moral fallout when the pair hit and kill a Moroccan teen and arrive at the soiree with his body in the back seat. Though it does little to dent the bacchanalian vibe of rich party-giver Richard (Matt Smith), the death prompts the boy’s grief-stricken father (Ismael Kanater) to arrive, demanding reparation from David and triggering a journey of epiphany for both spouses.

Peopled by unapologetic, blunt-talking characters and bringing up themes of racism, colonialism and wealth disparity, it’s a project comfortably in the wheelhouse of *The Guard*, *Calvary* and *War On Everyone* writer/director McDonagh, who optioned the book when he read it. “Am I drawn to unsympathetic characters?” he muses with a shrug over

a pint in a central London cinema bar. “Unsympathetic characters, a great plot, and a bleak ending. It’s probably what attracted me.” A plain-speaking man himself who refuses to carry a phone, McDonagh is unwilling to varnish his discussion of his project during *TF*’s chat; admitting he wanted to adapt a book rather than write another original screenplay because he “can’t be arsed” and aims to “upend conventions” with his work.

Certainly one of the conventions he relished inverting was Fiennes’ connection to romanticising the desert with *The English Patient* (and his star-making turn as T.E. Lawrence in *A Dangerous Man*). First to be cast, Fiennes is no hero here, playing a man whose unrepentant white privilege is challenged. Though he’s played ultimate baddie, Voldemort, in the *Potter* franchise, Fiennes was also attracted to the idea of playing an ostensibly awful person.

“At face value, we can call them despicable because of their entitlement, arrogance and lack of empathy,” Fiennes says from his home in Suffolk, wearing a crisply pressed white shirt not unlike his character’s wardrobe. “But I think the thing that makes [David] redeemable, is that he sees that he must go with the father of the dead boy. He sees that he must put himself in harm’s way. He’s not a coward. He faces something – and in facing it, various things become clear to him about who he is, and what he’s done. That’s what made me want to play the part. You know, it’s called *The Forgiven*, and in the nature of forgiveness, the idea of redemption is implicit, perhaps.”

With Rebecca Hall originally cast as his wife Jo, Fiennes was instrumental in replacing her when she left the project to make her directorial debut with last year’s *Passing*. McDonagh went back to his source material and was inspired not only in choosing another actress but changing the nationality of the character from English. “There’s the line in the book: ‘We should get you out of the sun before you start to bleed,’” McDonagh recalls. “And that made me think of a redhead. So then I went, ‘Oh, if Jo is American...’ So then we went to [Jessica Chastain]. Ralph was pretty keen on her. I think he rang her as well, to speak to her about it because he gave her her first film, *Coriolanus*.”

THAT’S RICH

Chastain had previously circled the book with her producer hat on but the rights had not been available. She was also attracted to the idea of playing with moral bankruptcy. “I like the transformation that she goes through,” she says over Zoom from New York. “When we first meet Jo, she has a lot of guilt, and a lot of compassion and empathy and sadness about the accident that occurred. And then, slowly, she starts to just live for herself. For her, it becomes an act of survival. One might say survival of the fittest in her mind – this idea that she had been asleep for so long. And now she’s alive, and she’s not going to waste any moment of her life thinking about others.” Living for herself means watching Chastain obdurately spout jingoism, snort lines of coke, down cocktails, slink about a luxe kasbah in evening wear, flirt in bikinis at an oasis and stare imperiously at staff through statement sunglasses.

“I’m very interested in gender and the stereotypes of women, and especially how so many people are threatened by a woman’s sexuality, and her sexual desire,” she says. “I love the tiny moment that John scripted between Jo and [head of staff] Hamid when he brings her tea, and she’s smiling, and she says, ‘Good morning’, and she’s so nice to him, and he completely ignores her. He doesn’t even look at her.

And then right after, she says [adopts cold tone], ‘You forgot the honey.’ And then also later on, she forces him in some sense: ‘Oh, you wouldn’t look at me before? But now you’re going to look at me – enjoying myself?’ I was very interested in playing a female character who wielded and allowed herself to feel power in her sexual desire.”

That confounding of expectations that McDonagh is so fond of is found in the switch from unsympathetic to empathetic in the characters our gender bias might not expect, according to the director. “David goes on a journey, and Jo reveals herself as something we thought she wasn’t at the start. He



McDonagh sets up a shot with star Ralph Fiennes.





Jessica Chastain and Ralph Fiennes' wealthy Jo and David Henninger do precious little to blend in.

becomes more empathetic, and she goes the other way."

A huge part of those journeys is the couple's separate interactions with the local people; staff like Hamid (Mourad Zaoui), who serves his guests with pride as well as pity/disgust, or Berbers like Abdellah (Kanater, "the Al Pacino of Morocco," says McDonagh), the father of the dead boy who wants atonement. McDonagh cast actors of Moroccan heritage to ensure veracity and lensed on location using practical effects.

As filming started in February 2020, Fiennes and Chastain got together immediately to build their characters' connection ("On the first day, we created this entire backstory and history from the beginning of the relationship that I think really helped to serve into playing them," says Chastain), and fireworks and party accoutrements were shipped in the fortress house that would become the centre of the misdeeds.

Having filmed previously in rainy Sligo and sun-bleached Albuquerque, McDonagh was thrilled with the visual dichotomy the region provided. "I didn't want to make a British film where it's going to be

grey, it's going to be raining, and people are frying bacon and punching fridges. Here, I knew I could go full bore with the production design, the costume design. And then you can counterpart it with the Berbers. It's all muted brown, and the house they're in. I could really go for it stylistically." And then... Covid.

With five days left to shoot, production was stopped in its tracks by the pandemic. One Saturday night the team heard the Premier League had been cancelled, by Sunday most of the cast had left, and by Monday Ralph Fiennes was running to alert McDonagh (Fiennes does carry a phone) that production had been shut down, and that final flights were leaving in two hours. With global lockdown taking effect, McDonagh flew to Australia to edit, hoping he had enough in the bag to complete the film, not knowing if he'd get those final days back during the bleak shut-in months.

(He did, cast and crew reconvened in Morocco in September 2020).

But in between shooting and release, the world had gone through a seismic experience, and, certainly in Britain,

watched rich, posh, influential people act with impunity during times requiring social, ethical and moral responsibility. So does watching *The Forgiven* now take on new significance? Will more of us recognise this particular breed of entitled elite?

"I think we've always recognised them," says McDonagh. "People are quite proud to show off their bigotry now, aren't they, really? That's the state we're in. I think we like watching pretty people in nice clothes in spectacular settings – it's as simple as that. There's something comforting about it, in a weird way, seeing terrible people doing terrible things. But I like people to make up their own mind. I think it seems like we're getting to a point where we can't have characters who make people uncomfortable anymore."

For Fiennes, the overriding takeaway theme is a need for empathy. "It's in an Islamic country, and these people are behaving with no sensitivity to the culture where they are enjoying themselves. So that kind of critique, it's a current thing. David goes to the poorest possible place imaginable, and sees the grief that he's caused, and it becomes clear to him – I find that that awakening, or that realisation about other cultures... for me, it was what was interesting. The film isn't entirely negative."

For Chastain, who'd already unpicked a relationship in TV's *Scenes From A Marriage*, the film is also, on a more intimate level, about the evolution of a couple. "What I love so much is the final scene – without giving

'HE FACES SOMETHING AND VARIOUS THINGS BECOME CLEAR TO HIM ABOUT WHO HE IS'
RALPH FIENNES

away too many spoilers – when you do see that perhaps there is a path. There may be a newfound understanding of each other, and a way of communicating, unlike the way it was before the trip."

Whatever audiences take away from the film, McDonagh is confident that he's crafted something worthwhile. "I'm really, really pleased with it. When you're making your first few films, and you get a bad review, you're like, 'Ugh. I've got a bad review.' But now I feel like: 'I know it's a good film, and I really like the film.' And if you get a bad review, you get a bad review, and it doesn't matter. You just keep going along." He takes a swig of his pint. "But I don't know how long I'll be directing for. I'm not really that into it [laughs]. I'd rather just lie on a beach with a beer." Right on DGAF brand.

THE FORGIVEN IS OUT IN CINEMAS ON 2 SEPTEMBER.

INTERVIEW JAMES MOTTRAM

“I DON’T WANT TO
CONTINUE PLAYING
CHARACTERS LIKE
I’M 30... I’M NOT
AFRAID OF SHOWING
MYSELF OLDER.”

ANTONIO BANDERAS

From '80s Almodóvar to Hollywood swashbuckling, Antonio Banderas' early career was the perfect template for a European actor wishing to make it in LA. But as he returns to Spain for wicked film satire *Official Competition*, it's his own third act that is proving indelible. He joins Total Film to talk acting, awards and ageing.

PORTRAITS MICHAEL LECKIE

CAMERA PRESS/MICHAEL LECKIE



M

aybe he's in Zorro mode. Or his gunslinger from *Desperado*. But Antonio Banderas is moving at speed. It's the middle Saturday at the Venice Film Festival, and the Spanish star is dressed casually, but marching towards *Total Film* with intent. First, interviews at the Excelsior Hotel followed by a press conference and premiere. "We're gonna use English?" he questions, his Andalucian lilt still in evidence despite all his time in LA.

Soon turning 62, he's sporting a clipped beard and auburn-dyed cropped hair – although if that's for his closely-guarded role in the upcoming *Indiana Jones 5* he won't say. Instead, he's on a mission to talk about new movie *Official Competition*, a gutsy satire of the Spanish film industry that would give *The Player* a run for its money. He plays Félix Rivero, a superstar actor about to undertake a new project with fearless director Lola Cuevas (Penélope Cruz, wearing a wig of flame-red curls that match Félix's Lamborghini).

As the egocentric Félix begins a torrid rehearsal process, it's a masterful turn from Banderas. "It's a treat to be reminded of his comic adroitness," praised *The New Yorker*. "With a litany of shrugs, pouts, and sidelong glances, he demonstrates how eager Félix is to have his feelings either massaged or hurt." You might also say it's drawn from 40 years of experience in the industry, beginning when Pedro Almodóvar hired Banderas, barely in his twenties, to play a gay terrorist in his 1982 film, *Labyrinth Of Passion*.

Until that point, the Málaga native had plied his trade on stage, after studying at the School of Dramatic Art and later joining the Spanish National Theatre. But the Almodóvar relationship was an enduring – and deliciously outrageous – one. Over the next eight years, they reunited for *Matador*, *Law Of Desire*, *Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown* and *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* Although the latter marked the start of a 22-year hiatus in their working relationship, Banderas was ready for a new Hollywood-gilded chapter of his career.

After landing roles in *The Mambo Kings* and *Desperado* – the latter by Robert Rodriguez, another director he'd forge a long association with – Banderas ascended the A-list when 1998 swashbuckler *The Mask Of Zorro* unexpectedly took \$250m worldwide. Since then, he's not been afraid to tease the Latin lover image – notably as DreamWorks animated feline Puss in Boots from the *Shrek* films, a role he's reprising in sequel *The Last Wish* later this year. He also went behind the camera twice, initially

with 1999's *Crazy In Alabama*, directing his then-wife Melanie Griffith.

These past years, he's nimbly balanced studio spectacle (*Uncharted*, *The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard*, upcoming thriller *The Enforcer*) with arthouse projects – including buying a theatre in Málaga. Better yet, after reuniting on *The Skin I Live In*, his most recent Almodóvar project, 2019's *Pain And Glory*, won him long overdue recognition: Best Actor in Cannes and a first Oscar nod for playing a drug-addled director. Following a health scare two years earlier, you get the feeling Banderas is squeezing every moment out of life. There's not a moment to lose.

Official Competition is a riotous look at the film business. But how truthful is it?

It's pretty much the anecdotal side of it. Because when we're working in movies, it's not like this, really. The people behave with certain coherence, and we try just to establish a relationship that is efficient to work. And so the people don't come with these unbelievable things. It's true that I have seen things that are very silly. There is an actor – of course, I'm not going to tell you who – every time that we did take a take, he moored like a cow. So we just put things in like this to play with that are funny, but they're not the essential side of the movie. It's true that probably in another time, the behaviours were like that. Not only in cinema, but in theatre, opera, the big divas – the stupidities that go with them. I can't sing, my dressing room is not red, for example! Things like that, that simply are too stupid. But, right now, people tend to be a little bit more practical. It can be more hidden, though. And especially to you [*the press*] – the way that actors or directors present themselves can be very deceiving. And the good ones will just pass, and you will never know. For example, in a press conference, or in a movie – [*they'll*] convince you of something that doesn't exist! A trick of the mind!

Although you've previously shared little screen time with her, did acting with Penélope Cruz feel easier because you knew her?

I think it was easier. Because we knew each other. We've known each other since she was 19 years old.

You were neighbours in New York, right?

That's where I met her actually. And so we are good friends. The time that she moved to Los Angeles, I was already established there. So we had a relationship. And, yeah, we commented many times: 'Hey,



Getting his first Oscar nomination in Pedro Almodóvar's *Pain And Glory*.



Banderas with Penélope Cruz and Oscar Martínez in the upcoming *Official Competition*.

let's work together.' And here, when she appeared on the set the first day, she was the character. And all the time that we were on the set, she was Lola. And it helped me a lot, to establish that relationship... forgetting that she was my friend. In fact every day when she took that wig away, it was like 'Ah...Penélope!'

There's a brilliant scene where Lola torments Félix with his awards. How do you feel about awards? Are they important?

Everybody has vanity. So when you receive an award here or in Cannes [*it feels great*]. But if I put this in my mind, and I analyse it, I don't believe in it. You have to do a campaign! To do a campaign to win something. I gotta recognise that. I was nominated for an Oscar. I was preparing to open my theatre in Málaga. To be travelling to the United States every week and a half, back and forth, it was exhausting. And I thought, 'They didn't see the movie!' So I have to convince them? And I remember saying this when I received the New York Critics'

'MY FATHER WANTED TO KILL ME – LITERALLY!'

Award... I felt a little bit embarrassed to have to promote myself for something that I had already done. And I remember that in the first row was Martin Scorsese looking at me and doing this [*nodding*], because everybody thinks the same way. But you have to do it because there are so many things involved around awards. It's money. For television, for products... and then

you just realise that the best award that we could get is if the people laugh, and they understand this story that we are telling you. That would be great! That's awesome.

What would you do to change awards shows?

You know what I would do with the awards – especially Oscars – that are given by the professionals? I will count them. I will say 'How many votes were there?' Because we will be surprised. We will be surprised and the Academy should oblige the actors to vote. You have to vote as an obligation. If you don't do it, you get out – and you have to watch the films! That's very important. I don't know about the Oscars. The Emmys are

17,000 [*voters*]. I think the Oscars are 11,000. Something like that. But I would like to know, with how many votes you win? It's maybe surprising how little people vote when they're not involved.

Taking you back, you grew up in Málaga. What are your early memories of being raised at a time when Spain was under Franco's rule?

What I remember being in Málaga at that time, very strongly, was the inferiority complex we had with everything. It came from your family; it wasn't an imposition from the state, though I suppose it was the result of a very specific way of doing politics in society. I remember when I said in my house that I wanted to be an actor, that was quite something. My father wanted to kill me – literally!

What was it like when you first started out?

When I arrived in Madrid in 1979, there was practically no work. There were big families in the theatre, and it was very difficult to get into those clans. Movies were very, very little. It was a time of change, and during that time, Pedro

➡ Almodóvar came along and literally changed the history of motion pictures in Spain. When he opened the door, many people got through that door.

He first cast you in 1982's *Labyrinth Of Passion*. Do you remember when you first met him? What was he like?

We were filled with intuition and we were young. There was no past. There was only future at the time. Right then, we were living in a very exciting time in Spain and we were coming out of a conservative Catholic character and suddenly Pedro was breaking all the rules of the game. Not only cinematic rules, but morality rules! Everybody was scandalised! I remember my mother going to see [Almodóvar's 1987 film] *Law Of Desire* and she came home and said [in a screechy voice], 'Why didn't you tell me?! I took all my friends to the movie and you're kissing this guy!' I said, 'I'm sorry Mum, but you have to wake up to the new Spain!' But that was good – then after two or three years, my mother started recognising that. A woman that was created and raised in a different culture, suddenly she started seeing a different reality and she accepted it. That was very important! So Almodóvar was responsible for that, to a certain point. And I was witnessing all of that; I was participating in all those movies and it was a very exciting time.

Were you ready for this controversy?

I remember loving it. I remember feeling like a Rolling Stone, something special. People were pointing at us on the street. We were going together everywhere. We were more like a rock 'n' roll group than people who make movies. Here comes the Almodóvar people! We were all together! It was very nice. But then our careers took a different direction, and it had to happen. I don't consider we would've continued working together all the time... because it wouldn't make sense. We had to grow in different directions. I had my own adventure, he had his own adventure... we evolved.

What made you leave Spain?

I ended up doing a movie for Warner Bros called *The Mambo Kings* and, yeah, of course there was a fascination with Hollywood! It sounded like... 'Wow!' It was a chance to do movies only Hollywood could afford. So for me it was an adventure and the adventure of my life. I only live one time. So I wanted to visit there and I wanted to see what it is to work with these actors that I admire so much. It was a dream of youth; why not fulfil it? Then it's like, 'OK, I did it. I got my



FIVE STAR TURNS

TIE ME UP! TIE ME DOWN! 1989

The fifth of Banderas' eight team-ups with Pedro Almodóvar, this pitch-black, Buñuelian comedy sees his Ricky released from psychiatric care to kidnap a porn star. Controlling men and relationship power games are the themes.

DESPERADO 1995

Banderas and Robert Rodriguez effectively remake *El Mariachi* on a bigger budget. Banderas' guitar-case toting gunslinger riffs on archetypes – Banderas grew up watching westerns and enjoyed "being on the other side of the mirror".

THE MASK OF ZORRO 1998

His Hollywood star soared when he played the masked avenger, all swishing sword and sizzling chemistry opposite Catherine Zeta-Jones. "We knew when we were shooting... that we were doing something interesting," says Banderas.

PUSS IN BOOTS 2011

After pepping up three *Shrek* sequels as the furry helper, Banderas was awarded this origin-story spin-off – the cat who got the cream, you might say. "An irresistible central performance by Antonio Banderas," purred industry bible *Variety*.

PAIN AND GLORY 2019

Banderas bagged a first Oscar nom playing a film director reflecting on his life and work, in Almodóvar's most personal movie. "[Pedro] wants truth," explains the star. "If you resist him, it's going to be more painful." **JAMIE GRAHAM**



LAUREN FILMS, SONY, PARAMOUNT/DREAMWORKS

name on the floor [on the Hollywood Walk of Fame] and I have done a bunch of movies and I know a lot of people and I got married and I have a daughter [Stella] that is half-American...' So it gave me a lot of things.

One of your biggest hits in the '90s was *The Mask Of Zorro*. What attracted you to playing that character?

I think we counted 30–35 different versions of *Zorro*. Most of them being movies, but for me it represented an interesting approach to a character that had never been portrayed by a Spanish actor. Not only that, but he was also one of the first heroes on the screen in Hollywood. He's a very legendary character with a long story. We had a very different point-of-view. With all the elements – Martin [Campbell, director], [co-stars] Catherine [Zeta-Jones], Sir Anthony [Hopkins] – it was impossible to say no to a movie like this.

You've always tried to work with American auteurs too, like Brian De Palma on *Femme Fatale*. Melanie Griffith had worked with him twice before. Is that what drew you to him?

When Brian called me, Melanie was very pushy! She said: 'You should read his script!' I read it and I said to her, 'Melanie, there is no beef here.' These characters are very lean and I didn't know if I should do it. I talked to Brian and asked him if we could talk about it. He said, 'Of course, write whatever you want.' So I started composing the character... and put it together in a completely different way. We went for dinner in Paris, and I brought up my papers and read for an hour. At the end, he said 'This is very good. You did a good job but it's not my movie! If you want to be in my movie, you have to do what's written. And I appreciate what you did – for another type of movie it would be great. But I have very specific ideas of what these characters will be. You decide.' I took a couple of days and said 'Yes'. For me, even if the character was not a main character, it was an opportunity to work with a person who I consider a master. He has a very strong personality on screen, and I just jumped into the part. I didn't regret it for one second.

What about your times with Steven Soderbergh? You worked twice with him on *Haywire* and *The Laundromat*...

Woah! That was a different world. Fast. Furious. No lights. I got to set on my first day in Barcelona [on *Haywire*],

a conversation in a coffee shop at the start of the movie. And two cameras, digital. You go there, you sit, no practical indications, action! Boom boom boom boom boom. Two cameras. Action! Boom boom boom boom boom. Moving on. To the airport. No lighting. Nothing. Just the natural light. I remember shooting in Mexico, with Michael Douglas and with Ewan McGregor, and we did six sequences in one day. It's a totally different method, a totally different shoot.

You've twice directed features, *Crazy In Alabama* and *Summer Rain*. Having worked with so many great directors, how was it stepping into the chair?

To direct a movie is such a crazy thing. It's very complex. You have to become an answering machine and carry so many things at the same time. I thought at the beginning, when I directed *Crazy In Alabama*, that my strong point would be working with the actors. I loved doing that, and I did it on *Summer Rain* too – getting a bunch of kids together who had never been in front of a camera before.

But I discovered in *Crazy In Alabama*, I had a tremendous [love of] framing and the meaning of that. I love that aspect of making movies, how you tell the story like that. Sometimes I have been working with directors just for that purpose.

One of your most beloved characters is *Puss in Boots*, who first appeared in *Shrek 2*. Was it a no-brainer role to take on?

What seduced me the most was the possibility of doing comedy with something that I love, just the contrast. I saw the character first by myself. Jeffrey [Katzenberg] showed me some drawings of the character in DreamWorks, in Los Angeles. But I didn't have a relationship with the other characters – Shrek and Fiona – but when I saw him, when I saw how little he was, I think we took a very strong decision there that determined the history of the character. Just provide him with a voice that actually doesn't work with the body. Instead of trying to do a voice that was little, something like this [a very high-pitched voice], we just tried to give him a voice that actually... if he looked at himself in the mirror and he sees the cat, he will be surprised. Because he thinks he's bigger, he thinks he's more arrogant. It's something that goes against the image, and that provides comedy. I think that's one of the secrets of the character. ➡

**'SUDDENLY
PEDRO WAS
BREAKING ALL
THE RULES'**

ANTONIO BANDERAS IN NUMBERS

|||||

8

Collaborations with
Pedro Almodóvar

116

ACTING CREDITS
TO HIS NAME

5

Golden Globe
nominations

\$929M

BOX-OFFICE TAKE OF
HIS HIGHEST-
GROSSING FILM,
SHREK 2

8

Times Banderas has voiced
Puss in Boots in feature films
(if you also count the
Spanish dubs)



➡ It paired you with Salma Hayek, who you've worked with since 1995's *Desperado* and you will reunite with again for this year's *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish*. Was that fun?

I had a record with Salma Hayek... in eleven days, we opened *Puss In Boots* in nine different countries, starting in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Germany, France, England, Spain, Italy and Australia... with 769 interviews in those days! They gave us a diploma at Paramount – the actors who made the most promotional interviews ever for a movie! Paired interviews – that's dramatic. Why is it dramatic? Because I knew her answers perfectly! I can mouth them! I remember a question they always asked her: 'So your daughter saw the movie?' And she said, 'Oh yeah... Mum, that cat sounds just like you!' I knew that! Every time! We were going to kill ourselves!

Repetitive junket interviews aside, what's the worst side of your job?

The worst that could happen is probably not in the movies, but in the theatre. The fear of the theatre is extraordinary. It's just there. If something happened, you just swallow the whole thing. Sometimes people don't even notice. But I remember one day on Broadway with *Nine*, I started singing a song that ended the first act. And I started singing, and I forgot the lyrics... completely. You know what I discovered there? In bad moments, good things happen too. If you don't panic on the stage, you can do anything. I just shut up and I didn't make any gestures. And I got all these girls, with these candles on their knees, singing a chorus. And there was a guy who plays me, at nine years old, dressed like me, who crosses the stage at that moment. And I just pointed at him, with my finger. I don't know why! I just pointed at him and followed him like that. And the orchestra was just playing along. And then the girls have a chorus and they start singing. And the people thought that was right... the composer said to me when Raúl Juliá played that character in 1982, the same thing in the same place happened to him. And you know what he did? He got on his knees and prayed, in Spanish, to the whole theatre! And he got a standing ovation! He said to the composer, 'I should do this every day!' And he said, 'No. no, no. I compose a song, you sing the song!'

You came back to work with Almodóvar again after two decades on 2011's *The Skin I Live In*. How did it feel?

I arrived there from Hollywood – I got my muscles now, look what I have done, I'm

more secure in front of the camera. Look Pedro what I have done with my voice, I can do this, I can do that! And he basically said, 'I'm not interested in the things that you learned there at all. Where are you?' That was the question: 'Where is Antonio?'

Perhaps your greatest triumph with him was *Pain And Glory*. You won Best Actor in Cannes and your first Oscar nomination. Was it different this time around?

When he called me, I basically said to him, 'I'm not going to be a general, I'm not going to take all the medals that I showed you last time... I am going to listen to you and I'm going to understand precisely why you want to do this movie and why you want me to play. And this is not a strategy – it's a way of getting to the truth.' You realise there are some moments in your life as a person, especially when you get to a certain age – and I am there already – in which there is only space for the truth. I had a heart attack [in 2017] and it was very clear – you learn a lot from that. You learn that there are many important things in your life and there are a bunch of things you thought were important and they are not. When you see the face of death close to you, you realise it like this – it's the best university in the whole world. You learn very fast.

What did it change?

A lot. It changed a lot. There was a nurse, another woman, in the hospital that I went to in London, and I spent the first night there after they put three stents in my heart, and this woman was taking care of me that night – she was a very beautiful lady! And she said, 'Do you believe in popular culture?' I said, 'Yeah, why?' And she said, 'Why do you think people say that they love all the people with all of their heart? Why do they say you broke my heart? Why don't they say I love you with all my brain? Or I love you with all of my kidneys or all of

'HUMAN BEINGS MAKE MISTAKES AND SAY THINGS THEY REGRET'

my liver? Because, Antonio, the heart is a pump that throws oxygen in your body but it's also a warehouse for feelings. My friend, you're going to get really, really sad in the months to come.' I said, 'Very depressed?' She said, 'No, depression is a medical condition. You're going to get sad.' And she was totally right. I became very sensitive. I remember watching movies and suddenly crying or reading poetry... what the fuck is happening to me?!

How has your approach to work changed as you've got older?

What I try to understand is myself in relation to my profession. What I don't want is to continue playing characters like I'm 30, because I'm not... that would be pathetic. I want to adapt my age to the characters that are coming now and try to understand me as a person into the characters that I have to play. I'm not afraid of showing myself older. People will say, 'That's not Zorro!' Well, I've been Zorro my whole life... no!

Have you learned things from the characters you play?

In a way with all the things I am describing, yes. Definitely there are a number of things you learn... basically, you learn that we all do have to come to terms with those things. We don't travel through life with a backpack filled with mysteries and greatness. Everybody looks back and says, 'I didn't close that deal, with my mother, with my brother, with a friend, with somebody.' We are not perfect. We are human beings. Human beings make mistakes and say things they regret.

Are there films you regret making?

It's not regrets. The word is not regret. They brought me here and I am satisfied with where I am. Really. I think if you look for perfection... it's OK. I probably had to make those mistakes in order to understand myself and to take the next step. It's a normal thing for all of us.

OFFICIAL COMPETITION IS IN CINEMAS ON 26 AUGUST. *PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH* OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 3 FEBRUARY 2023.



With Elena Anaya in 2011's *The Skin I Live In*, directed by Pedro Almodóvar.

ANTONIO BANDERAS LINE READING

"BLESS ME, FATHER, FOR I HAVE JUST KILLED QUITE A FEW MEN."

EL MARIACHI
DESPERADO

"Fear me, if you dare."

PUSS IN BOOTS
SHREK 2

"THE WORLD CHANGES; WE DO NOT. THEREIN LIES THE IRONY THAT FINALLY KILLS US."

ARMAND
INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE



EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL



KILLS IT



ON TARGET



WORTH
PURSUING



MISSES
REPEATEDLY



DEAD FILM
WALKING



SCREE

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

94

THE GRAY MAN
Hit and Ryan...



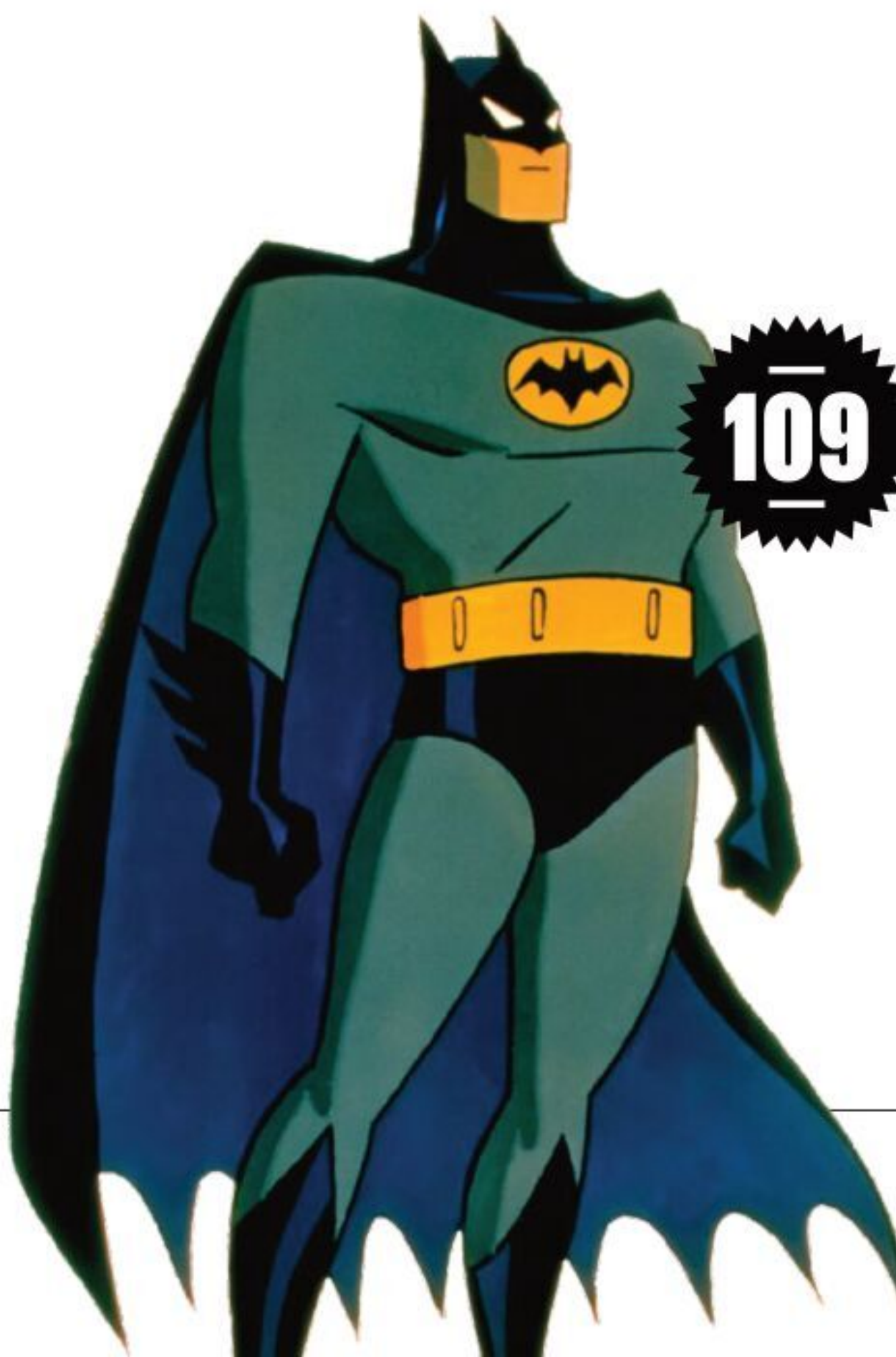
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100



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OUT NOW

All Light, Everywhere	★★★	p105
The Balance	★★★	p104
Clean	★★	p104
Corrective Measures	★★	p101
Death Of A Ladies' Man	★★★	p97
Doctor Strange In		
The Multiverse Of Madness	★★★	p101
Executive Order	★★	p104
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Unstuck In Time	★★★★	p96
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Notre-Dame On Fire	★★★	p97
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The Legend Of Hank	★★	p99
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Wayfinder	★★★	p101

27 JULY

The Deer King	★★★	p105
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29 JULY

Fire Of Love	★★★	p97
Hit The Road	★★★★	p105
Joyride	★★★	p99
Thirteen Lives	★★★★	p98

5 AUGUST

Fadia's Tree	★★★	p99
Maisie	★★	p96
Nightclubbing: The Birth Of Punk Rock In NYC	★★★★	p96

12 AUGUST

Blind Ambition	★★★	p96
Eiffel	★★★	p100

TBC

A Bird Flew In	★★	p99
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ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Bullet Train	3 August
DC League Of Super-Pets	29 July
Nope	12 August

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

EXTRAS

Archive reviews	p106
Blu-ray reviews	p106
TV, Extras, Soundtracks, Games, Books	p109-114

THE GRAY MAN¹⁵

Cap me if you can...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS, NETFLIX



THE DAY OF THE JACKAL 1973

A professional assassin is aimed at French President Charles de Gaulle in this exciting thriller. Remade with Bruce Willis.

THE BOURNE SUPREMACY 2004

Bourne again, our man is framed for a CIA op gone wrong and must use all of his wits to survive.

DRIVE 2011

Gosling plays another skilled, taciturn man facing dangerous odds in a throwback thriller.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

Back in 2014, when brothers Anthony and Joe Russo directed their first MCU movie *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, much was made of how it channelled the conspiracy thrillers of the 1970s. Not only had Steve Rogers awoken from ice to a more cynical, nefarious age, he now found himself standing next to Robert Redford, whose long shadow stretches back to classic paranoia pictures *Three Days Of The Condor* and *All The President's Men*.

Nine years and four movies later (MCU triumphs *Captain America: Civil War*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Avengers: Endgame* and misfiring PTSD crime drama *Cherry*), and the Russo brothers are at it again. A cat-and-mouse espionage thriller, *The Gray Man* is based on Mark Greaney's novel, which Joe first started tinkering with while directing *The Winter Soldier*.

The titular antihero is Court Gentry (Ryan Gosling, back, praise be, from a self-imposed four-year exile after citing overexposure), sprung from serving a three-decade sentence at Florida State Prison to become a black-books operative for the CIA. Sierra Six, as he's codenamed, is the best they have... at least until he's assigned to kill a BAD GUY who turns out to be something rather less reductive and passes Six a chip detailing dark agency secrets.

Now our man is on the run and being chased down by Lloyd Hansen (Cap himself, Chris Evans), a freelance contractor not fettered by the CIA's rulebook. "He has a higher kill count than the entire Mossad," says the program's chief (played, fully clothed, by *Bridgerton*'s Regé-Jean Page), and



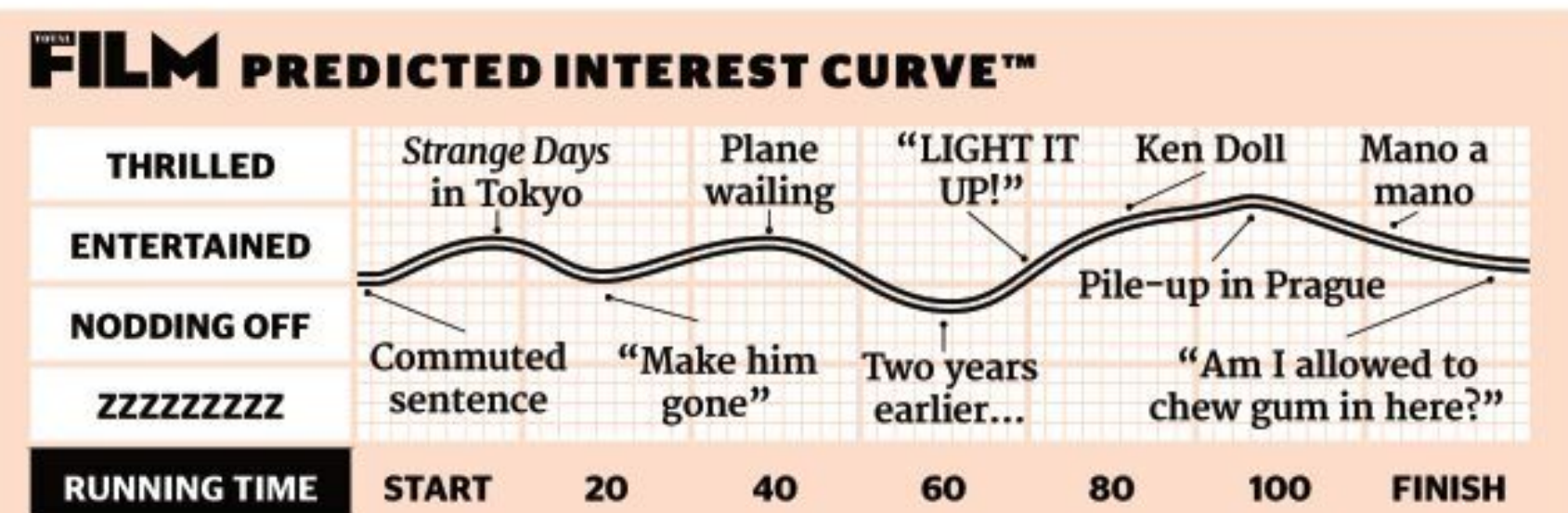
Hansen also has a trash 'tache, an armoury of one-liners and a sociopathic nature. "You wanna make an omelette, you gotta kill some people," he shrugs after yet another explosive takedown fails to put Gentry in the ground but rustles up enough collateral damage to fill a dozen morgues.

The Gray Man has but two distinguishing features. Firstly, you've got the leads' considerable charisma, with Gosling's signature minimalism (always chewing gum, he hasn't much time for words) neatly balancing out Evans' chirpy grotesque. Secondly, there's the succession of increasingly OTT set-pieces staged on planes, trams and automobiles – one outrageous shootout in Prague took *two months* to capture and plays like the climax of *The Wild Bunch* shoved into a city-sized blender with the demolition derby of

DIRECTORS Anthony Russo, Joe Russo
STARRING Ryan Gosling, Chris Evans, Ana de Armas, Jessica Henwick, Wagner Moura
SCREENPLAY Joe Russo, Christopher Markus, Stephen McFeely **DISTRIBUTOR** Netflix
RUNNING TIME 120 mins

The Blue Brothers. Elsewhere, *The Gray Man* recalls the *Bourne* movies and those two action-figurehead Johns, Woo and Wick, as Hansen calls in "every grade-A wet team from here to Reykjavik". Gentry, for his part, is here to kick ass, and he's *never* all out of bubble gum.

Set-pieces and stars are often enough, at least for a Friday-night popcorner. But only once or twice does the elaborate mayhem approach the standards the Russos set themselves in the MCU (especially in *The Winter Soldier*). And like Michael Bay in *Ambulance*, the





brothers are far too enamoured with new-fangled drone tech – time and again the camera zips past the clashing protagonists and whizzes off down the full length of a street, barrel rolling as it goes. Just why it does this other than it looks kinda cool is anybody's guess. You might find yourself wishing that the Russo bros had left their toys in the box at least until they sorted out the overall look of the picture. Murky in a manner that's not moody but flat and drab, the aptly titled *The Gray Man* will likely fuel those Film Twitter arguments that cinematography is becoming a lost art.

Unlike onscreen fighting, which only gets better and better (imagine Roger Moore's Bond trading close-up blows with Bourne or Wick). Here, the martial-arts fisticuffs have real punch, blows landing



'Gosling's signature minimalism (always chewing gum, he hasn't much time for words) neatly balances out Evans' chirpy grotesque'

as hard as they did in *Civil War*'s iconic Cap versus Iron Man scrap. There's also the added bonus of Ana de Armas getting in on the action as Agent Dani Miranda, an ally of sorts for Six. OK, so her pin's kept in place and she's never allowed to detonate like she did as Bond's fellow agent Paloma in *No Time To Die*, but there are hints of Miranda's grace and gusto. No doubt she'll play a bigger role in sequels and perhaps even land a spin-off movie, should *The Gray Man* prove golden with viewers.

Given this is an adap of Greaney's first book in the

series and the 12th drops next year, there's a whole shadowy world to be explored. Let's hope the plot thickens as we go along. Because although *The Gray Man* comes out blasting, that's pretty much the extent of it. And with *Top Gun: Maverick* having only recently reminded us what a blockbuster *can* be, more shades of Gray are needed in future outings. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Favouring charisma over character, this action-espionage thriller hangs lots of action – some solid, some ace – on a threadbare plot.



The Zimbabwean quartet live it up at a wine-tasting contest like no other.

BLIND AMBITION TBC

Grape expectations...

★★★★★ OUT 12 AUGUST CINEMAS, CURZON HOME CINEMA

Four Zimbabwean former refugees make their way to the World Wine Tasting Championships in this charming documentary. Joseph, Tinashe, Pardon and Marlin all have stories to tell – most of them heartbreaking – about leaving ‘Zim’ and ending up in neighbouring South Africa, where they each found their way to becoming sommeliers in Cape Town, despite having little prior knowledge about wine.

Now, after raising funds, they’re on their way to the “Olympics of wine” – a blind-tasting competition that pits them against expert teams from 23 other countries, many of whom have far greater access to all types of wine than them. Directors Robert Coe and Warwick Ross deftly weave individual backstories around the countdown to the WWTC in Burgundy, alongside interviews with experts such as Jancis Robinson, who admits the Zimbabweans have helped her “rekindle the magic of wine”.

Once there, their eccentric French coach Denis Garret throws a spanner in the works, his ego getting in the way, and the doc slightly veers off track. A shame, too, that the contest itself isn’t quite the exciting showdown one might hope for. But really, *Blind Ambition* is all about the journey, how these four joyful gents were even in a position to compete in the first place. “There is so much untapped talent in Zimbabwe,” we’re told, and their stories prove it. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT If the finale lacks the requisite drama, *Blind Ambition*’s story is still of feelgood vintage.



MAISIE 15

★★★★★ OUT 5 AUGUST CINEMAS

“He’s a drag queen, I’m a drag artiste.” The unquestionable highlight of Lee Cooper’s affectionate but uneven documentary comes early, as David Raven, aka doyenne of the famous Brighton cabaret scene Maisie Trollette, bristles at a message from his US counterpart, Darcelle XV. A culture-clash meeting between the two veterans delivers a few awkward laughs, while a poignant climactic performance may draw a tear or two. Yet if Cooper’s portrait of Raven’s home life is authentically unglamorous, these meandering, uneventful scenes in between are, alas, a bit of a drag.

CHRIS SCHILLING



KURT VONNEGUT: UNSTUCK IN TIME TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Robert B. Weide is best known as the Emmy-winning director of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, but for 40 years his white whale was this long-gestating documentary on Kurt Vonnegut, the acclaimed *Slaughterhouse Five* author who died in 2007. The finished product is as much about Weide and Vonnegut’s keenly felt friendship as it is about Vonnegut’s extraordinary journey from prisoner of war in Dresden to influential sci-fi scribe, but Weide’s proximity to his subject means the more unsavoury elements of Vonnegut’s past go unexamined. **JORDAN FARLEY**



NIGHTCLUBBING: THE BIRTH OF PUNK ROCK IN NYC TBC

★★★★★ OUT 5 AUGUST CINEMAS

A lively, loving documentary tribute to the New York punk scene, notably the now-forgotten Max’s Kansas City, a venue that played host to cult bands (the New York Dolls) and A-list punters (Bowie, Warren Beatty, Jane Fonda...). Charting punk’s progress as it gobs its way into the mainstream, the film ticks off such key events as the opening of rival club CBGBs and the dawn of the Sex Pistols. Lots of ‘we were there’ interviewees (from Alice Cooper to Billy Idol) and no shortage of grim anecdotes (“bacterial” toilets – ugh!).

JAMES MOTTRAM



ITHAKA 12A

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

The case of Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder and all-round controversial figure, gets a new, personal treatment in this campaign-focused documentary. Following not Assange himself, but his father John Shipton, the film chronicles the ongoing fight to stop Assange’s extradition and get him released from prison. Director Ben Lawrence offers probing insight into not just John’s life but that of Assange’s fiancée, lawyer Stella Moris. The film’s alliances are clear from the off; though it dances perhaps a little too lightly around certain allegations, a sense of injustice is keenly felt by the end.

ERLINGUR EINARSSON

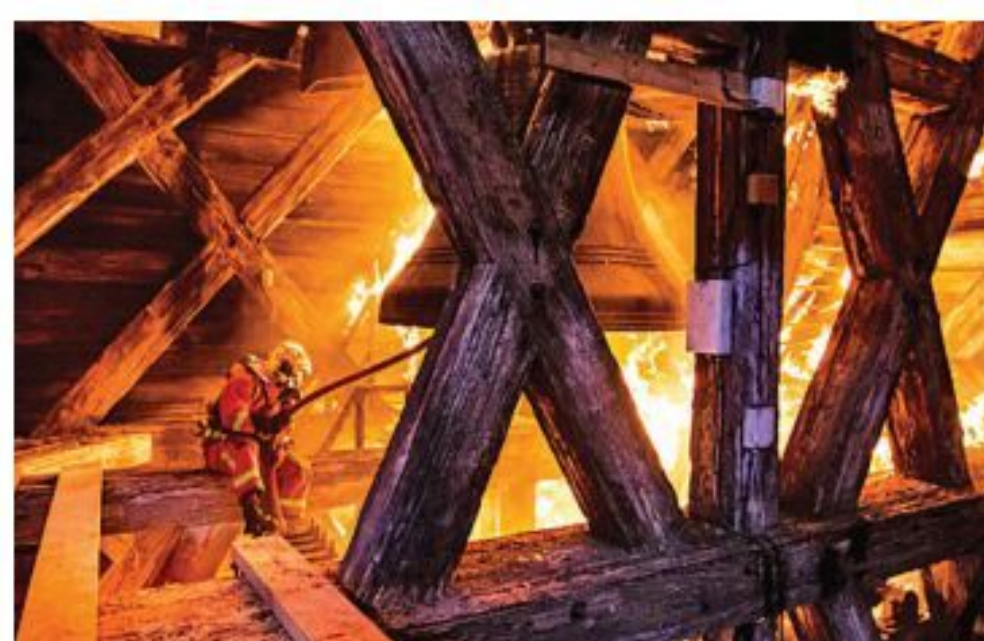
CURZON, BOHEMIA MEDIA, ALTITUDE, MUSIC FILM NETWORK, DARTMOUTH FILMS, SONY, PATHE, DOGWOOF, BLUE FINCH FILM, VERTIGO



FRUITS BASKET: PRELUDE TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Adding context to popular anime *Fruits Basket*, this prequel explores the history of main character Tohru's (Laura Bailey) parents. But with all the original fantasy elements stripped out, it offers a simpler melodrama steeped in romantic reflection. Following a recap of the three-season show, there is an ick factor to overcome as the film unapologetically depicts dispassionate 19-year-old student-teacher Katsuya (J. Michael Tatum) courting vulnerable 14-year-old Kyoko (Lydia Mackay). However, an acute focus on relatable detail and ruminations on the nature of love and grief make for powerful viewing. **MATT LOOKER**



NOTRE-DAME ON FIRE 12A

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

A disaster movie with a difference, Jean-Jacques Annaud's account of 2019's cathedral fire is less a survival story than a suspenseful inside view of firefighters at work. A security guard begins a new job; when his alarm buzzes, the unthinkable happens. While Annaud's characters and script admittedly lean into the corny and piecemeal, he impressively re-creates the terrors of dodging falling masonry and liquid lead or – a stand-out sequence – navigating tight-fit stairwells. Newsreel footage amps up the realism, and a sly Donald Trump burn boosts the appeal.

KEVIN HARLEY



FIRE OF LOVE TBC

★★★★★ OUT 29 JULY CINEMAS

French geologists Maurice and Katia Krafft shared a burning obsession for volcanoes, documenting all of their lava-prodding until their deaths in 1991. Their explosive pairing was previously explored in Werner Herzog's *Into The Inferno* (2016), but this poem to passion uses the Kraffts' spectacular footage of eruptions to draw a throughline between Earth's roiling unpredictability and the couple's maverick/foolhardy research methods. Though the magma impresses, Miranda July's whimsical narration and a slippery narrative makes this Sundance favourite a curiously opaque watch. **JANE CROWTHER**



DEATH OF A LADIES' MAN 15

★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL

Leonard Cohen's songbook inspired this hit-and-miss romantic drama from writer/director Matthew Bissonette, both in story and soundtrack. Diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour, ageing lothario Samuel O'Shea (a twinkly, intense Gabriel Byrne) begins to spiral. Hallucinating musical numbers (all Cohen) and convos with his dead dad and various literary characters, Samuel flees to rural Ireland, connecting with spirited Charlotte (Jessica Paré), who's almost 20 years younger. Samuel's plight is sombre, but the mood isn't, from the elegant surrealism to the thoughtful homages to Cohen. **JOEL HARLEY**



Veronica had run off mid-haircut again...

SHE WILL 15

Slash and burn...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

This is a nightmare!" sighs veteran actress Veronica Ghent (Alice Krige) when she discovers the remote Scottish retreat she's travelled to is a haven for pretentious eccentrics. Yet the real nightmares lie elsewhere in Charlotte Colbert's atmospheric first feature, a sly critique of the patriarchy in which incinerated 18th-century witches and an abused 20th-century starlet unite to avenge themselves against oppressive male privilege.

Having just undergone a double mastectomy, Krige's recluse could do without learning that the director to whom she owes her stardom (Malcolm McDowell) intends to remake the 1969 film that made both their names. With help from her kind young nurse Desi (Kota Eberhardt) and the occult powers of her peaty surroundings, however, she finds strength to confront both her present woes and the spectres of her past: ghosts that return through hallucinogenic dream sequences, an *Exorcist*-like levitation and a bubbling, predatory mud slick with a mind of its own.

Veronica and Desi's initially strained relationship may bring to mind the likes of *Clouds Of Sils Maria* and *Saint Maud*, while flashbacks to condemned women in scold's bridles have the whiff of 2016's *Brimstone*. But for the most part, *She Will* is its own singular and unsettling creation, with a Clint Mansell score that mixes choral harmonies and atonal strings to menacing effect. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT A woman scorned gets some belated payback in a creepy chiller with a #MeToo resonance.



Ron Howard's film thrillingly recreates a tension-filled real-life rescue.

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

APOLLO 13 1995
Houston, we have a template for *Thirteen Lives*: Howard's true-life space-peril drama.

THE IMPOSSIBLE 2012
Another Thai-set tale of courage, set during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

THE RESCUE 2021
National Geographic's Bafta-nominated doc about the mission to save the Wild Boars.

For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

THIRTEEN LIVES TBC

The cave and the bold...

★★★★★ 29 JULY CINEMAS 5 AUGUST PRIME VIDEO

Near the start of Ron Howard's true-life survival tale, Narongsak Osatanakorn (Sahajak Boonthanakit), the governor of the Chiang Rai province in northern Thailand, remarks "This could be a long night." That may be the understatement of a lifetime. The film recreates how, over nearly three weeks, thousands of volunteers gathered to help 12 boys and their coach from the Wild Boars football team, who had ventured into the local Tham Luang Nang Non cave shortly before colossal rainfall left them trapped deep inside.

Taking place across June and July 2018, the situation was so dramatic it drew global attention away from the World Cup in Russia (which Howard

plays out in the background) as a daring rescue mission was mounted. Here, we're shown how Narongsak, who's supposedly about to be dismissed from his post, is made to stay while all efforts are made to save the boys.

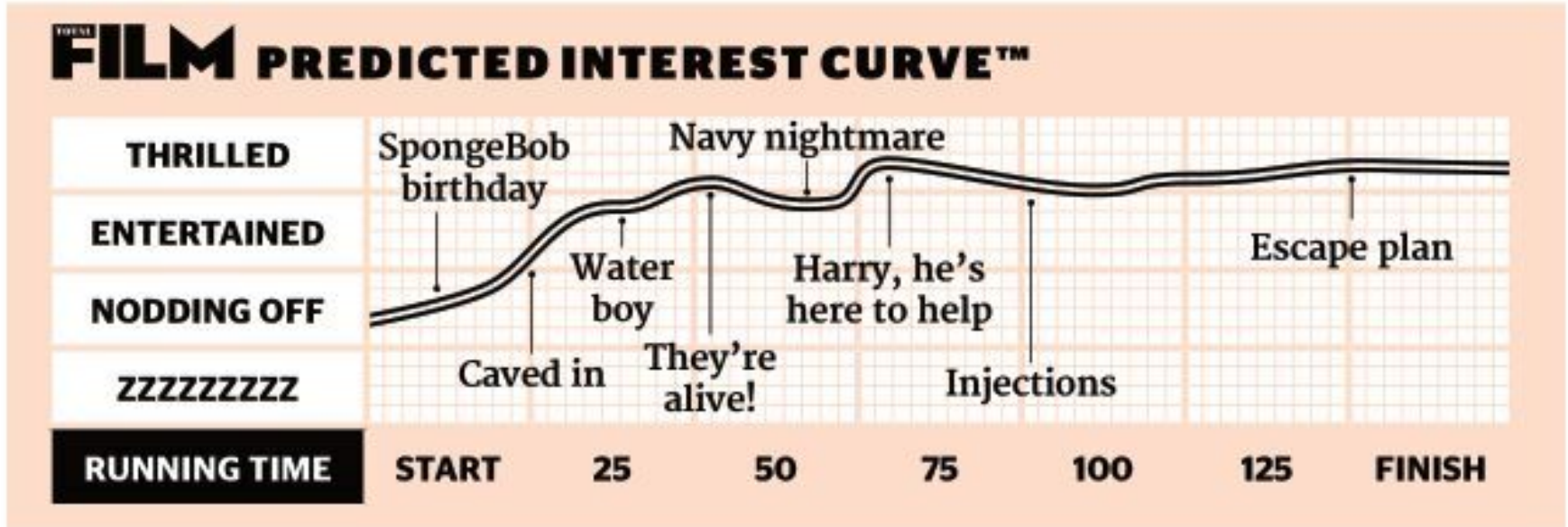
The Royal Thai Navy Seals are called in, alongside highly experienced British cave divers, Rick Stanton (Viggo Mortensen) and John Volanthen (Colin Farrell). Early forays into the flooded cave system show just how difficult the task ahead is, with pitch-black narrow passageways and strong currents. Even when Stanton and Volanthen find the trapped group – after 10 days – hungry but alive, the waters show no signs of receding, making it nigh-on impossible to get them out. With the monsoon impending, and parents waiting anxiously outside, these 13 souls are left with very little chance of salvation. It's only when Stanton and Volanthen call in fellow divers Harry Harris (Joel Edgerton), Chris Jewell (Tom Bateman) and Jason Mallinson (Paul Gleeson) that a plan is hatched that might just work...

DIRECTOR Ron Howard **STARRING** Viggo Mortensen, Colin Farrell, Joel Edgerton, Tom Bateman, Paul Gleeson, Sahajak Boonthanakit
SCREENPLAY William Nicholson
DISTRIBUTOR United Artists/Amazon Studios
RUNNING TIME 146 mins tbc

Screenwriter William Nicholson (*Gladiator*) does a fine job in measuring out the mission, while paying due heed to the Thai locals who helped divert the deluge of water falling on top of the mountain above the cave – a crucial part of the rescue operation. Credit also Howard, who brings his recent work in documentaries into play here (maps, captions and news reports keep us in the loop throughout), but also uses every ounce of skill when it comes to brewing tension. Likewise, he cunningly uses the attendant media and those praying to Buddhist gods outside the cave to capture a sense of escalating panic. Though the director can't quite stop the final act from feeling repetitive, the result is still a moving and nerve-shredding experience.

JAMES MOTTRAM

THE VERDICT A gripping, claustrophobic thriller that's also a fine tribute to human endeavour. Even knowing the outcome won't stop nails being bitten.





A BIRD FLEW IN TBC

★★★★★ OUT TBC CINEMAS

Handsome monochrome drone shots of the striking London skyline aside, the best thing you can say about Kirsty Bell's directorial debut is that it captures, all too well, the tedium of the Covid-19 lockdowns. Its protagonists, all of them connected to a terminated film shoot, include an actor battling cancer (Derek Jacobi), a screenwriter (Jeff Fahey) and an editor with a dying mum (Morgana Robinson). Unfortunately, none of these characters ever manage to justify the time that Bell (onscreen herself as, yes, the film's director) insists we expend on their solitary, solipsistic navel-gazing.

NEIL SMITH



JOYRIDE TBC

★★★★★ OUT 29 JULY CINEMAS

Olivia Colman plays Joy, a solicitor with a serious drinking problem, a baby to put up for adoption and an upcoming holiday booked in Lanzarote. When she teams up with precocious kid-on-the-run Mully (Charlie Reid), the unlikely pair hit the road to take the baby to its new home before Joy's flight. Colman is as superb as ever, but director Emer Reynolds struggles to settle on a consistent tone, bouncing between characters in agonising trauma and happy-go-lucky road-trippin' sequences. There's certainly joy to be had here; it's just a shame the roads are so well travelled.

LEILA LATIF



ON THE 3RD DAY TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW SHUDDER

After losing her son to a car accident, traumatised mum Cecilia (Mariana Anghileri) is drawn into a confrontation with a violent religious lunatic. As those involved with the tragedy start to die under mysterious and unnerving circumstances, this Argentinian supernatural thriller from director Daniel de la Vega makes its giallo influences known (don't look now, but the kid in the red coat is a shade on the nose...). Striking visuals, melodramatic performances and an impressively overbearing score help disguise the slow-burn story, which gleefully descends into an unpredictable – and messy – finale. **JOEL HARLEY**



FADIA'S TREE TBC

★★★★★ OUT 5 AUGUST CINEMAS

Born into a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, Fadia has never known her ancestral land and yet continually yearns for it. A chance encounter with documentary-maker Sarah Beddington ignites a homecoming journey by proxy, with the director heading to Palestine on her behalf to search for a mulberry tree laden with meaning. Weaving in the rhythms of nature, Beddington's feature debut builds poetic parallels between the migration of birds and human impermanence. The result is a moving, albeit somewhat overstretched, study of the ripples of modern diaspora.

RAFA SALES ROSS



Newly anointed samurai Hank, dealing out some ruff justice.

PAWS OF FURY: THE LEGEND OF HANK TBC

The arf samurai...

★★★★★ OUT NOW SKY CINEMA, NOW

It's easy to guess the inspiration for this Sky Original family animation. Mel Brooks voices a key role, while the working title was *Blazing Samurai*. Alas, comedy genius is in short supply here, with a so-so script and an admittedly respectable cast unable to deliver a kid-friendly *Blazing Saddles* redux. Think *Kung Fu Panda*-lite instead.

Michael Cera voices the titular Hank, a plucky beagle chosen as the new samurai protector of a town that's populated with dog-hating cats. As he undergoes training with reluctant mentor Jimbo (Samuel L. Jackson), Hank fails to realise that his appointment is actually a ploy to ruin the village, masterminded by neighbouring cat leader Ika Chu (a jarringly unmistakeable Ricky Gervais).

A high gag rate keeps the film's economical runtime seem even zippier, but occasionally clever sight gags get lost amid an over-reliance on irreverent self-awareness and fourth-wall-breaking punchlines ("Hey, that music! This is the training montage, isn't it?"). As a result, *Paws* lands precious few big laughs. All the efforts to tickle the funny bone come at the expense of engagement: this is a hero's journey without any heart. By the time the inevitable climactic showdown takes place on a giant toilet seat – for reasons – *Paws Of Fury* feels like it's performing somersaults for attention rather than honouring its own premise. **MATT LOOKER**

THE VERDICT A starry martial-arts underdog story with more flippancy than flips, making for a hollow tale.



FAYA DAYI 12A
★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Those who insist that a documentary's overriding priority should be to stick to the facts will likely struggle with Jessica Beshir's psychedelic debut feature. But viewers open to the abstract might find themselves beguiled by this portrait of Ethiopia's Oromo and Harari communities. At the centre of Beshir's socio-political/mythical odyssey is khat, a commodified, euphoria-inducing plant that essentially defines the culture's structure and rhythms. Shot in dreamy monochrome, it's a mosaic of interconnected stories that manages the rare feat of conveying spirituality with just a camera. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**



The lads were reenacting the *Top Gun: Maverick* beach football scene again.

PERSUASION PG
Austen under-powered...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS, NETFLIX

Jane Austen's last completed novel gets the contemporising treatment (à la *Bridgerton*) in theatre director Carrie Cracknell's feature debut. Here, Dakota Johnson's Georgian 'old maid' Anne Elliot (at 27, she's getting on a bit) swigs wine and does *Fleabag* double takes to camera while experiencing heartbreak and romantic hope.

Miss Elliot has previously given up her engagement to dashing Captain Wentworth (a miscast Cosmo Jarvis) on the advice of snobby relations, but is now regretting being persuaded to shoot for a more socially acceptable beau. Aware of her family's shortcomings, as well as society's expectations of women, Anne is thrown when Wentworth returns to her life just as another suitor (Henry Golding) enters the picture.

Eye-rolling down the lens as her Pa (Richard E. Grant, delicious) and sisters (Mia McKenna-Bruce, Yolanda Kettle) display their bias, addressing the audience directly and enduring romcom tropes – accidental jam on face, awkward outdoor wees, booze spills – Anne is presented as a modern woman with relatable emotions and quandaries. A novel approach for an umpteenth adap of *Emma*, perhaps, but Anne's story is so seldom told onscreen that the fourth-wall-breaking feels gimmicky rather than fresh. That said, Johnson does well with both the accent and the spirit of the piece, bringing such charm to proceedings it's easy to overlook the lack of feels between her and Jarvis. **JANE CROWTHER**

THE VERDICT A decent showcase for Johnson's considerable verve, but falls short of the Austen-movie yardstick set by Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*.



RUBIKON 15
★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, DIGITAL

The end of days is a torpid affair in this half-developed Austrian sci-fi. When the Earth is engulfed in a mysterious deadly fog, the threadbare crew of an orbiting space station face a head-scratcher. Should they endanger themselves to help, or survive among the stars? As the lead trio chase this debate around in endless circles, director/co-writer Magdalena Lauritsch rarely summons the requisite sense of urgency, much less suspense: as the characters make one variably daft and dangerous decision after another, any hope of persuasive dramatic tension dissipates in the fog.

KEVIN HARLEY



GREEN LANTERN: BEWARE MY POWER 15
★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD

26 JULY DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurette

It takes all of 10 minutes for DC's latest ani-movie to give our hero a Power Ring, hook him up with a few Justice Leaguers and launch us into a cosmic conflict. This origin story is in such a rush to go epic, you never feel the full weight of ex-Marine John Stewart's (Aldis Hodge) ascension to Lantern-hood. Now and then it settles into an appealing buddy-movie groove with Jimmi Simpson's Green Arrow – when it isn't squeezing in familiar comic-book faces or expository flashbacks. Colourful sound FX amplify the action, but it all rings hollow. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



EIFFEL 15
★★★★★ OUT 12 AUGUST CINEMAS

The titular French tower's late-19th-century construction provides the backdrop for this fictionalised, old-fashioned romance from director Martin Bourboulon (*Divorce French Style*). Romain Duris plays engineer Gustave Eiffel who, following a chance encounter with ex-lover Adrienne (*Death On The Nile*'s Emma Mackey), makes the decision to design and build a 300-metre iron tower. *Eiffel* rushes over the considerable public resistance to the pioneering project at its core. Yet it papers a few cracks with dynamic widescreen lensing and the leads' powerful, class-crossed chemistry.

TOM DAWSON



MONSTROUS TBC
★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL

Fleeing an abusive past, Laura (Christina Ricci) and her young son Cody (Santino Barnard) attempt to start a new life in 1950s California, settling in an isolated house. But is the threat really over? And what dark, spooky secrets could the local lake possibly be holding? Director Chris Sivertson (*All Cheerleaders Die, I Know Who Killed Me*) serves up an aggressively set-designed world that's steeped in vintage monster movies (think *Creature From The Black Lagoon*). If the horror element feels oddly tame, just hang on in there – in due course it becomes clear how the project attracted an actor of Ricci's calibre. **MATT GLASBY**



WAYFINDER PG
★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

British-Ghanaian artist Larry Achiampong makes his feature-length debut with this meandering account of *The Wanderer* (Perside Rodrigues), a young girl travelling across England during the pandemic. Starting at Hadrian's Wall, she works her way south, through serene nature, empty village roads and silent museums. This meditation on being a British person – particularly one of colour – feels more of an exhibition piece than a cinema attraction. Still, amid the picturesque lensing, it wrestles with issues of class, race and social division, not always smoothly (or subtly), but often effectively. **ERLINGUR EINARSSON**



DOCTOR STRANGE IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS 12A
★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, 4K, DIGITAL EXTRAS ★★★★★

Commentary, Deleted scenes, Gag reel

Much like Sam Raimi's film, the extras package doesn't push as far as you might like, but remains a fun time. Raimi's candid chat track teases moments that didn't make the final cut, which include bonus Bruce Campbell – who elsewhere gives good quote on the director's other signature star, the Oldsmobile. Hurtling like a Raimi crash zoom, featurettes hit standard beats (overuse of 'collaboration', actors fighting losing battles with wind machines) and, not for the first time in the MCU, invoke Patrick Swayze in *Point Break*. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**



CORRECTIVE MEASURES 15
★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, DIGITAL

The news of Bruce Willis' early retirement due to his aphasia diagnosis casts an unavoidable shadow over his remaining DTV releases. Adapted from a graphic novel, *Corrective Measures* at least gives the action icon a fun gimmick. He plays Julius 'The Lobe' Loeb, a legendary inmate doing time alongside depowered superhumans in a prison run by Michael Rooker's corrupt warden. Think *The Suicide Squad* meets *Cool Hand Luke* (directly quoted), minus wit or flair. Overstuffed with subplots, it's like a whole season of a more fantastical *Prison Break* crammed into 106 minutes. **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

After the Minions hijacked his *Despicable Me* films, Gru felt it's only right to return the favour.



MINIONS: THE RISE OF GRU U
Almost infamous...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Underestimate the Minions at your peril. The adorable yellow TicTac-shaped troublemakers have already demonstrated serious prequel power, raking in over a billion dollars for 2015's *Minions*. So in this fun, hectic and overstuffed follow-up set in the funky '70s, director Kyle Balda sticks faithfully to the tried-and-true recipe of ingenious heists and hectic Minion slapstick, with lashings of pop-culture gags for the adults, all delivered at supersonic speed.

Besotted with the villainous Vicious 6 gang, tweenager Gru (Steve Carell) tries to impress them by stealing their infamous Zodiac jewel, which possesses world-crushing powers. When they turn on him, Gru finds a could-be saviour in the gang's vengeful ex-leader Wild Knuckles (a deliciously grumpy Alan Arkin). Meanwhile, the Minions scramble to find their missing "Mini Boss" in a gloriously candy-coloured San Francisco.

This time, the mass of frenetic story strands gives a disjointed feel, restricting most of the Vicious 6's famous voice talents (including Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dolph Lundgren and Danny Trejo) to roaring chases.

But gorgeous squash-and-stretch animation and visual gags still deliver that bumbling Minion magic, as they take a passenger jet for a playful plunge, or bungle kung-fu training with Michelle Yeoh's stern guru. Kids will chuckle reliably throughout, but adults may hope for less frenzy and more flair in the next Gru-vy outing. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Gru and his crew bring frantic fun but little originality to this slice of '70s supervillainy.

THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER^{12A}

The god couple...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS



FLASH GORDON
1980
Like *LAT*, Mike Hodges' cult space opera has none of *Star Wars*' self-importance, and a killer rock soundtrack.

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
1981
A near-unbeatable action movie, Spielberg's classic established the modern template for prickly romantic adventures.

THOR: RAGNAROK
2017
Waititi's MCU debut reinvigorated Thor as the funniest Avenger. If you enjoyed the glimpse of Hulk's muscular rump here, *Love And Thunder* won't disappoint...

For more reviews visit [gamesradar.com/totalfilm](https://www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm)

No character in the MCU has undergone a more effective glow up than Thor Odinson. From the drab nadir of *The Dark World* to *Ragnarok*'s cosmic romp, the God of Thunder found his groove when irreverent kiwi Taika Waititi unlocked Chris Hemsworth's criminally untapped comic chops.

Their latest pairing is more extension than reinvention, but by most metrics it's a superior reunion – wilder, funnier and significantly more heartfelt. If Marvel has been coasting on a comfortably unexceptional level of quality for much of Phase 4, the joyous *Love And Thunder* is a return to the glory days of the Infinity Saga.

When we rejoin Thor some four years after the events of *Endgame*, the second-strongest Avenger has gone from “dad bod to god bod”, as returning rock dude Korg (Waititi) imparts during a delightful recap, and is still in league with his reluctant comrades the Guardians Of The Galaxy (a treat during a brief but satisfying appearance). Effortlessly saving the day with JCVD-homaging splits and roundhouse kicks during a riotously daft opening set-piece, Thor remains physically unstoppable, but emotionally his losses have taken their toll. Thor needs something to live for once again.

One day a message from across the stars alerts him to the existence of Gorr the God Butcher (Christian Bale) – a dark force on a one-man mission to slay every living deity with his deadly Necrosword. This brings Thor to New Asgard, which has turned into a tourist hotspot under the rule of King Valkyrie



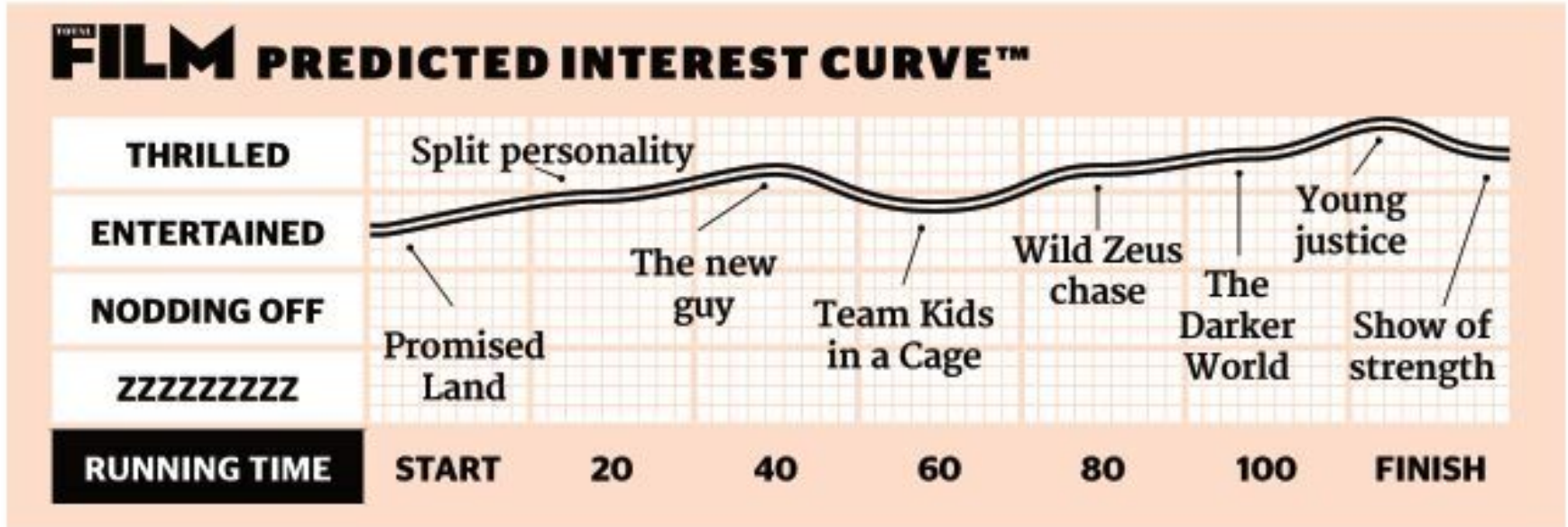
Thor and Thor soar once more as they score four for this fourth hit of Thor lore.

(Tessa Thompson), and back into the orbit of his ex-girlfriend Dr. Jane Foster (Natalie Portman), who has transformed into the Mighty Thor after being deemed worthy by a reformed Mjolnir.

Portman's return to the MCU gives *Love And Thunder* the flavour of a romcom, in much the same way that *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness* dabbled in horror. Portman certainly looks the part, putting on a gun show worthy of big-screen superherodom. And if she's on surer footing during the film's affecting dramatic beats than the off-kilter comedy that has come to define Waititi's style, that's partly by design – Portman's Mighty Thor is a work in progress who spends much of the film workshoping her own catchphrase and adjusting to life as a monster-stomping god.

DIRECTOR Taika Waititi **STARRING** Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Christian Bale, Tessa Thompson, Russell Crowe
SCREENPLAY Taika Waititi, Jennifer Kaytin Robinson **DISTRIBUTOR** Disney **RUNNING TIME** 125 mins

Racing along at a relative clip – an increasing rarity in a sea of bloated films and miniseries – *Love And Thunder* takes Thor, Jane and Valkyrie to the Omnipotent City of the gods, presided over by Russell Crowe's hysterically funny Zeus. A blowhard who's less interested in the wellbeing of his true believers than the logistics of his next orgy, he allows Waititi to strike gold with a screen legend in similar fashion to Jeff Goldblum's Grandmaster in *Ragnarok*. Also unexpectedly chucklesome is Christian Bale's Gorr. One of the MCU's





more effective villains, the character transcends a rote revenge origin story thanks to a deliciously unhinged performance that veers between frightening and laugh-out-loud funny, often in the same sentence. In one scene Gorr delivers what can only be described as the *CBeebies Bedtime Story* from hell, while his formidable abilities make him a believable threat.

Though if we're picking nits, Valkyrie feels like a third wheel here (a fifth if you count sentient axe Stormbreaker, which can't contain its jealousy with Mjolnir back on the scene). Thor and Jane's relationship is also awkwardly back-loaded in a way that feels like you're not getting enough time with the two of them together until the film is almost over. And, as with *Ragnarok*, the dramatic stakes inevitably take a hit when

'One of the MCU's more effective villains, Gorr transcends a rote revenge origin story thanks to a deliciously unhinged performance'

there's rarely more than a few seconds till a tension-obliterating belly laugh.

But that's Waititi's MO, and once again the filmmaker has put his unmistakable stamp on the MCU, bending the house style in a way that even Sam Raimi struggled to. There's a desire to put a smile on every audience member's face here – try to resist the exceptional deployment of *four* Guns N' Roses bangers – that means even the film's glaring shortcomings barely register as it careens in carefree fashion from one terrifically entertaining sequence to the next, including a late showstopper involving a group of young actors which ranks among the

most overwhelmingly gleeful moments Marvel has committed to the screen.

After four solo movies – the first Avenger to reach the milestone – it's clear there's still plenty of charge left in the God of Thunder. Whether there's a fifth remains to be seen, but on the basis of *Love And Thunder*, Waititi and his mighty Thors are more than worthy of another outing. **JORDAN FARLEY**

THE VERDICT Unashamedly absurd, wildly entertaining and face-achingly funny, *Love And Thunder* makes *Ragnarok* look like Bresson. Another classic Thor adventure.

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN RETURN PG

Loco heroes...

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Whisking another trio of plucky city kids away for rural Yorkshire larks, this sweet-natured, locomotive-laden sequel to the 1970 family classic is here to steam up the screen (in the most wholesome way).

This time, scrappy Manchester siblings Lily (Beau Gadsdon), Pattie (Eden Hamilton) and Ted (Zac Cudby) are WW2 inner-city evacuees, swept up by the big-hearted Bobbie (Jenny Agutter, certifying her national-treasure status) to live with her, her jolly headmistress daughter Annie (Sheridan Smith) and grandson Tommy (a perky Austin Haynes).

Director Morgan Matthews showed his ease with a kid's POV in 2014's X+Y, but can't keep sentimentality at bay here, as the kids battle bullies around the picturesque Oakworth station. Yet Danny Brocklehurst's (Brassic) script is determined to retain the original *Railway Children's* big-hearted compassion. So Lily and the others team up to investigate why Kenneth Aiken's runaway G.I. Abe is hiding in their secret railyard den...

Though it's a good-looking and well-played film, the plot chuffs along at a stately, let's-learn-about-WW2 pace that may frustrate today's Marvel-reared kids. Still, this is a solid, evocative homage to a British classic, sure to please nostalgic adults and train buffs hungry for the film's pretty period settings and cosy storytelling. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Though it works up only a modest head of steam, this is a respectful, handsome and heartfelt sequel.



Sheridan Smith and Jenny Agutter rocking impeccable jacket-and-hat combos.



THIS IS GWAR TBC
★★★★★ OUT NOW SHUDDER

Juggling archive footage, talking heads and animation, this warts-and-all documentary tracks fancy-dress rockers GWAR on their journey from novelty act to controversial metal institution. As the costumes and colourful characters take off, (fake) gore-and-semen-spattered shows of legend are born. So, too, are power struggles with frontman Dave Brockie, band in-fighting and subsequent tragedy. For all the exploding phalluses and bodily fluids, this is a heartfelt, bittersweet and surprisingly frank effort. Famous fans Weird Al and Alex Winter add their voices to the adoring chorus.

JOEL HARLEY



CLEAN 15
★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL

Adrien Brody doesn't just star in this bleak thriller about a garbage collector turned vigilante, he also co-wrote it, produced it and composed the score. Shame it's somewhat, ahem, trashy then, for all its loner antihero's Travis Bickle-ish musings and the ferocity of its climactic bloodletting. Like John Wick before him, Brody's Clean is a reformed killer keen to go straight. But when the local drug dealers dare to menace his surrogate daughter, he starts taking waste disposal literally in Paul Solet's (2017's *Bullet Head*) derivative crime yarn. It's a case of bin there, seen that.

NEIL SMITH



EXECUTIVE ORDER 15
★★★★★ OUT NOW DIGITAL

This Brazilian dystopian satire boasts a fantastic idea that unfortunately doesn't translate into a great movie. Alfred Enoch plays lawyer Antonio, who sues the Brazilian government for reparation for all descendants of African slaves in the country. The response? An executive order, enforced violently, that sees legal Black citizens deported to Africa. Sadly, the on-the-ground chaos that follows is reflected in a messy, all-guns-blazing approach, diminishing its impact. A shame, as helmer Lázaro Ramos' feature debut offers some resonant ideas about resistance and far-right politics.

JAMES MOTTRAM



THE BALANCE 12A
★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

From the story of sporting legend Muhammad Ali to the catchy beats of Outlandish's hit single 'Aicha', this documentary aims to chronicle Islam's growing presence in the entertainment industry over the last few decades. Intertwining archive footage with talking-head testimonials, director Abrar Hussain offers a considered study of art as a vital vehicle for cultural and religious self-expression. Shame, then, that *The Balance* is hindered by a frustrating reluctance to move beyond cold, detached facts and into the infinitely more interesting – and engaging – territory of the personal.

RAFA SALES ROSS



ALL LIGHT, EVERYWHERE TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

All-seeing and all-recording – but only when they point it in the right direction – the Axon police body camera is the subject of this documentary by filmmaker and cinematographer Theo Anthony. As he explores the controversial gadget's scope and application within modern US policing and state surveillance, the film recalls *Minority Report* – except the reality here is scarier than any science fiction. But though essential questions are asked, they're not pursued rigorously enough; any overarching point is obscured by a lack of focus and distracting – if impressive – visuals.

JOEL HARLEY



PRIZEFIGHTER TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW PRIME VIDEO

In 1800, aged 19, bare-knuckle boxer Jem Belcher became the Champion Of All England; his fame brought riches and women and then his downfall: Belcher lost an eye in 1803 and his title in 1805, though never his fortitude. *Prizefighter* is a fascinating story told mechanically by Daniel Graham's biopic, which offers leaden-footed jabs of drama as the booze and training montages begin to flow. At least Matt Hookings' blandified Belcher has Ray Winstone's spirited trainer Bill Warr and Russell Crowe's boozy, blokey granddad Jack Slack in his corner.

JAMIE GRAHAM



Once you get something stuck in your head...

THE DEER KING 15

Cervid pass...

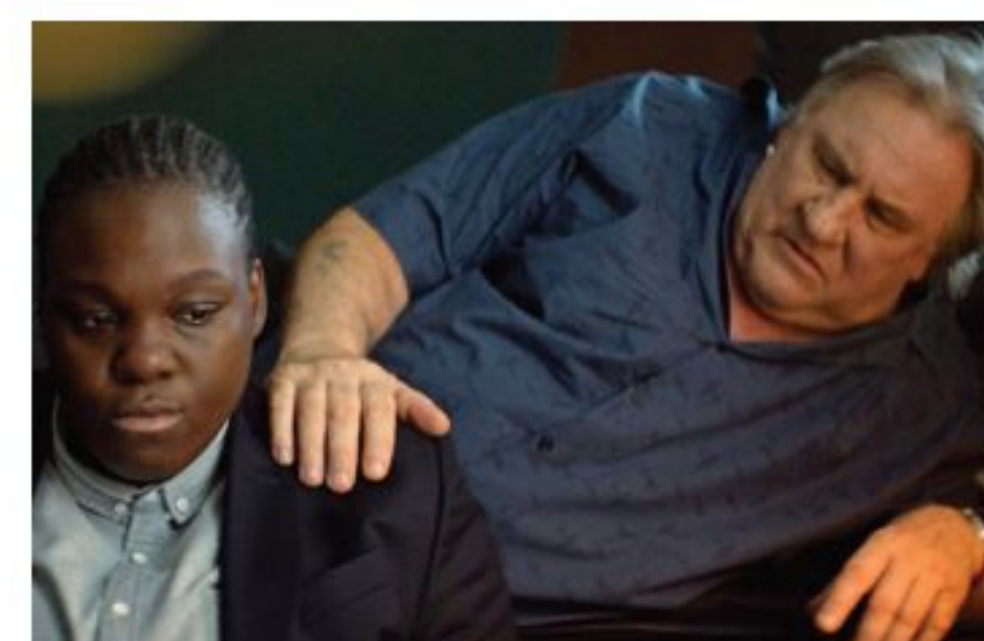
★★★★★ OUT 27 JULY CINEMAS

Two Studio Ghibli alumni unite for their co-directorial debut in this ambitious adap of Nahoko Uehashi's 'medical fantasy' novels. Masashi Ando and Masayuki Miyaji worked alongside Hayao Miyazaki on the likes of *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* (2001). The influence of the former is clearly apparent in a rather timely tale involving a deadly pandemic and the race to find a vaccine.

As a new strain of the *mittsual*, or Black Wolf Fever, spreads across the land, two nations – one whose citizens appear strangely immune to the disease – pursue Van (Shin'ichi Tsutsumi), a giant of a man who miraculously survived a wolf attack that seems to have left him with supernatural powers. Adopting young orphan Yuna (Hisui Kimura) as his surrogate daughter, he settles in a quiet rural village, but will a clever tracker or a desperate doctor get to him first?

Dense with ideas and themes (science versus faith, religious zealotry, political fanaticism), *The Deer King* struggles to explore them all across a two-hour runtime, while leaving several characters underdeveloped. Its strong visual storytelling, however, compensates for its patchy script – an eerie encounter with stilt-walkers in a misty forest leaves you wishing it were twice as long. Meanwhile the found-family relationship between Van and Yuna supplies the film's emotional thrust, carrying it through to a rewarding, bittersweet ending. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

THE VERDICT Miyazaki's protégés deliver a bold, occasionally touching animation – but the maestro needn't look over his shoulder just yet.



ROBUST TBC

★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

Gérard Depardieu is Georges, an ageing, egotistical movie star about to shoot a new costume drama. Déborah Lukumuena (*Divines*) is Aïssa, his newly assigned personal security guard (and amateur wrestler). Cue an odd-couple comedy-drama with a tender edge, Georges letting down his defences as Aïssa tends to the lonely man's whims. Constance Meyer's feature debut isn't perfect: Depardieu isn't exactly stretching himself here and the director/co-writer tends to overcook the symbolism (like Georges' weird, sharp-toothed pet fish). But a sparkling Lukumuena brims with scene-stealing confidence. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



HIT THE ROAD 12A

★★★★★ OUT 29 JULY CINEMAS

Iranian writer/director Panah Panahi makes an eye-catching feature debut with this vibrant road movie, following an unnamed family driving from Tehran towards the mountains that border Turkey. Inside the SUV are Mum (Pantea Panahiha) and Dad (Hasan Majuni), their two sons – one taciturn (Amin Simiar), the other hyperactive (Rayan Sarlak) – and an ailing dog. Ominously, no one mentions their destination; but as Panahi shifts between cramped interiors and imposing landscapes, he deftly blends humour and heartbreak. The cast impress too, not least when miming to '70s Iranian pop hits.

TOM DAWSON

PARIS, TEXAS 12A

Far from home...

1984 ★★★★★ OUT 29 JULY CINEMAS

Before returning to Berlin for *Wings Of Desire* (1989), German director Wim Wenders took a languid, lingering look at the American spaces that inspired some of his finest work. With a desolate sorrow at its core, *Paris, Texas* is a study of self-exile that rediscovers the lonesome power in those immense landscapes. Intimate and expansive, the result imbues insurmountable emotional crisis with authentic grandeur.

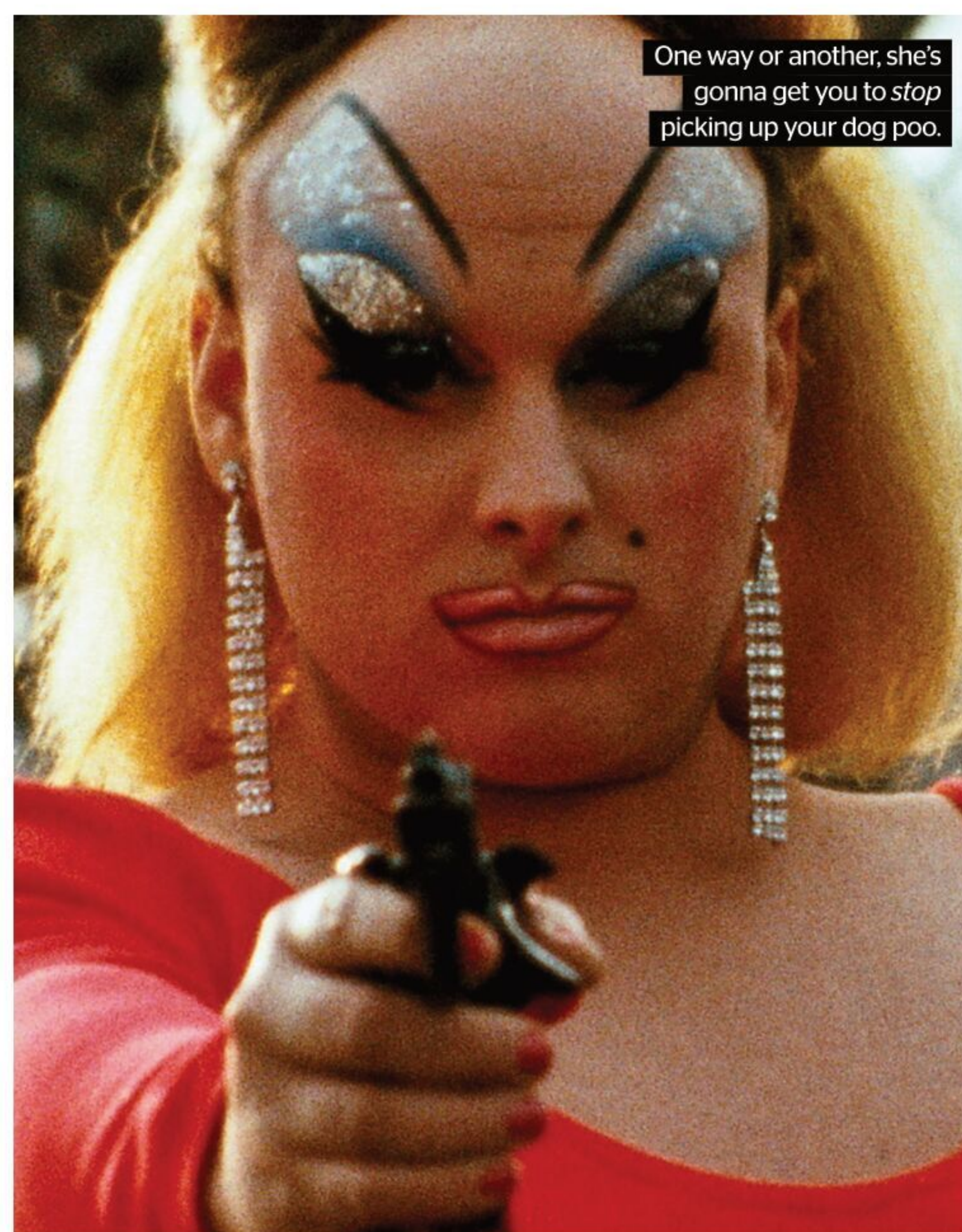
The landscape of Harry Dean Stanton's face is its match, lined with untold pain as his Travis stumbles out of the desert into Texas after four years away. Collected by his brother Walt (Dean Stockwell), he reunites with his seven-year-old son Hunter (Hunter Carson), prompting big questions: why did Travis leave? And where's Mum?

Working from Sam Shepard and L.M. Kit Carson's sparse script, Wenders reconstructs Travis' past patiently, until an encounter with Hunter's mother (Nastassja Kinski) reveals why this is no country for broken men. Inspired by road movies and westerns, *Paris, Texas* devastates during a peep-show sequence, where Stanton's confessional and Kinski's features speak volumes about bruises that won't heal. Made sublime by DoP Robby Müller's exultant images and Ry Cooder's yearning score, the movie gives haunting expression to the spaces between people and places, summoning a sense of terminal displacement that lingers deep in the soul. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Mournful and majestic, Wenders works hypnotic miracles of inner/outer landscaping. Stanton stuns.



The weekly motocross meet was always a reason to dress up.



One way or another, she's gonna get you to stop picking up your dog poo.

PINK FLAMINGOS 18

Trash hit...

1972 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Documentary, Featurettes, Outtakes, Booklet

Watch as Divine proves that not only is she the filthiest person in the world, she is also the filthiest actress in the world. What you are about to see is the real thing..." So runs John Waters' narration during the notorious climactic sequence of his exercise in bad taste. What follows, as the drag queen scoops freshly deposited dog faeces into her mouth and starts chewing, is a thing of screen legend; discussed far more than actually seen.

Of course, that's just one of many shocking moments from Waters' trash masterpiece about a sleazy married couple trying to rob Divine of the title 'the filthiest person alive'. Their unsavoury MO is to kidnap women and have their servant rape them so they can sell the resulting offspring to lesbian couples. The taboo-shattering acts that follow are a veritable hit-list for film censors, making it all the more pleasing that the BBFC has passed *Pink Flamingos* uncut, clearly appreciating the agitprop hilarity and anarchic exuberance that underlies this joyously transgressive cult classic.

Fittingly, Criterion is celebrating the film's 50th anniversary with a divine Blu-ray release. As well as a new 4K restoration (grossness never looked so good), it's also loaded with extra treats, including two typically gossipy commentaries from Waters, plus *Divine Trash*, the award-winning 1998 doc about the filmmaker's life and work. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VERDICT A perversely pristine Blu-ray presentation of the ultimate midnight movie. Truly trash-tastic.

CURZON, SONY/CRITERION, EUREKA, STUDIOCANAL, 101 FILMS



OUTSIDE THE LAW 12

1920 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurette, Alt ending, Booklet

An early collaboration between director Tod Browning and actor Lon Chaney, this crime melodrama casts the latter in dual roles (including that of the main heavy), with Priscilla Dean taking centre stage as framed jewel thief 'Silky Moll'. It moves at such a clip that not even the overly sentimental second act (complete with adorable moppet and grating "Oo don't love me like him do, does oo?" baby talk) or significant print damage towards the end will mar your enjoyment of this brutal and philosophical silent caper.

ANTON VAN BEEK



ROCK 'N' ROLL HIGH SCHOOL 15

1979 ★★★★★ OUT NOW, BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Doc, Featurettes, Outtakes, Booklet

"It's like a Warner Bros cartoon come to life with a little bit of *Beach Blanket Bingo* and *The Girl Can't Help It* in there," says co-writer Richard Whitley of this goofy slice of teen anarchy featuring US punk icons the Ramones. Existing somewhere on a cinematic throughline running from *Grease* to *Heathers*, what this Roger Corman production lacks in plot it makes up for with its absurdist rapid-fire gags, cast of cult favourites (P.J. Soles! Mary Woronov! Paul Bartel!) and brilliant '70s-rock soundtrack.

ANTON VAN BEEK



Mbissine Thérèse Diop stars as Diouana.

BLACK GIRL 15

Out of Africa...

1966 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Short film, Featurettes, Essay

It's hard to overstate the impact and influence of Ousmane Sembène (1923–2007) on African cinema. He was the first African to make a short film (1963's *Borom Sarret*, included on this Criterion release), before making *Black Girl*: not only the first feature made by an African but widely – and correctly – considered a masterpiece.

It tells the story of Diouana (Mbissine Thérèse Diop), a young Senegalese woman who travels to Antibes for a nannying job. There, she is degraded and treated with contempt, all while dreaming of the life she once had in Dakar. Sembène's direction is rooted in an understated lyricism. His use of disembodied voices makes the film wash over you as pure poetry. The evils of colonialism are conveyed with subtlety; yet all the whispers and glances are what slowly dehumanise and crush our heroine.

Part of the power of *Black Girl* (which was inspired by a true story) is its continued relevance 56 years on. Sumptuous '60s fashions aside, much of the film feels like it could be present-day Antibes. Its tragedy feels inevitable and universal, as if there are countless Diouanas who have existed and met similar ends. But perhaps most striking are those moments, which play out like a call to arms, showcasing Sembène's belief that his films were in part political tools, and that justice for the victims of the colonial mindset must be demanded.

LEILA LATIF

THE VERDICT One of the most important African films ever made. Interviews with academics who knew Sembène personally add heft to the extras.



THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE 15

1972 ★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurettes

A 50th-anniversary restoration of Spanish surrealist Luis Buñuel's sublime comedy of frustration. Six bourgeois Paris friends attempt to meet up for a meal... yet each time are thwarted by increasingly bizarre interruptions, whether it's the army, police or armed drug dealers. At the peak of his powers, Buñuel shifts smoothly between 'reality' and a series of death-driven dream sequences, revealing the unruly fears and desires of his entitled male characters. Pick of the plentiful extras is an engaging chat with late co-writer Jean-Claude Carrière.

TOM DAWSON



SUMMERTIME PG

1955 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurettes, Essay

The on-camera canal dunk Katharine Hepburn endured for David Lean's Venice-set romance left the star with a life-long eye infection. Film lovers, though, were rewarded with one of the star's most charming and poignant performances. Her vulnerable turn as a lonely singleton who finds short-lived love with a married shopkeeper (*South Pacific*'s Rossano Brazzi) rightly garnered the actor the sixth of her 12 Oscar nominations. Criterion's 4K restoration comes with a 1963 interview with Lean about the film he considered his own personal favourite.

NEIL SMITH



NEXT STOP, GREENWICH VILLAGE 18

1976 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Video essay, Gallery

An affecting mix of bittersweet nostalgia and painful personal experience lies at the heart of Paul Mazursky's '50s-era coming-of-ager about a Jewish actor (Lenny Baker) who moves out of his parents' Brooklyn home to seek fame in bohemia. Both funny and tragic, this Fellini-esque comedy drama's biggest strength is ultimately its killer cast, from the late, great Baker to brilliant supporting turns from Ellen Greene, Christopher Walken and Shelley Winters as the last word in overprotective mothers. Solid extras. **ANTON VAN BEEK**



THE BIG CITY (MAHANAGAR) PG

1963 ★★★★★ OUT NOW CINEMAS

A welcome reissue by the BFI as part of their retrospective belatedly (thanks to Covid) marking the centenary of the great Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray. The director's first film set in his native Calcutta, this monochrome classic captures a mid-'50s society in social, cultural and economic flux. The wonderful Madhabi Mukherjee plays middle-class housewife Arati, who takes on a saleswoman's job in order to support her extended family. Unfolding with unhurried ease, this is an astutely observed tale, in which Ray treats all his characters, however flawed, with considerable sympathy. **TOM DAWSON**



OKJA 15

2017 ★★★★★ OUT NOW BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurettes, Web videos

"We at the Mirando Corporation believe everybody deserves less," claims one of the faux web ads for the controversial multinational behind *Okja*'s loveable 'super pigs'. Thankfully, The Criterion Collection doesn't feel the same way, serving up a smorgasbord of bonus goodies to support the disc debut of Bong Joon-ho's (*Parasite*) heartwarming environmental fable. Highlights include a conversation between Bong and producer Dooho Choi and detailed accounts of the virtual and practical techniques used to make *Okja* herself such a believable (and adorable) screen presence.

ANTON VAN BEEK



RED SONJA 15

1985 ★★★★★ OUT NOW DVD, BD, 4K

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Documentary, Featurettes, Gallery

A new 4K resto for this kitsch '80s fantasy, inspired by Robert E. Howard's writings. Brigitte Nielsen's warrior seeks revenge across a fictional land that includes male-zapping talismans, mechanical beasts and one very annoying boy prince. Arnie co-stars as Lord Kalidor, a Conan-esque fighter who keeps watch over her. Director Richard Fleischer gives the film an eerie and, at times, spectacular look; but for all its feminist credentials, leaden dialogue, wooden support and ropey effects hamper enjoyment. Top extra is a doc on poster king Renato Casaro. **JAMES MOTTRAM**



THE UNTOUCHABLES 15

Begun, the Capone wars have...

1987 ★★★★★ OUT NOW 4K UHD, STEELBOOK

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Featurettes, Memorabilia

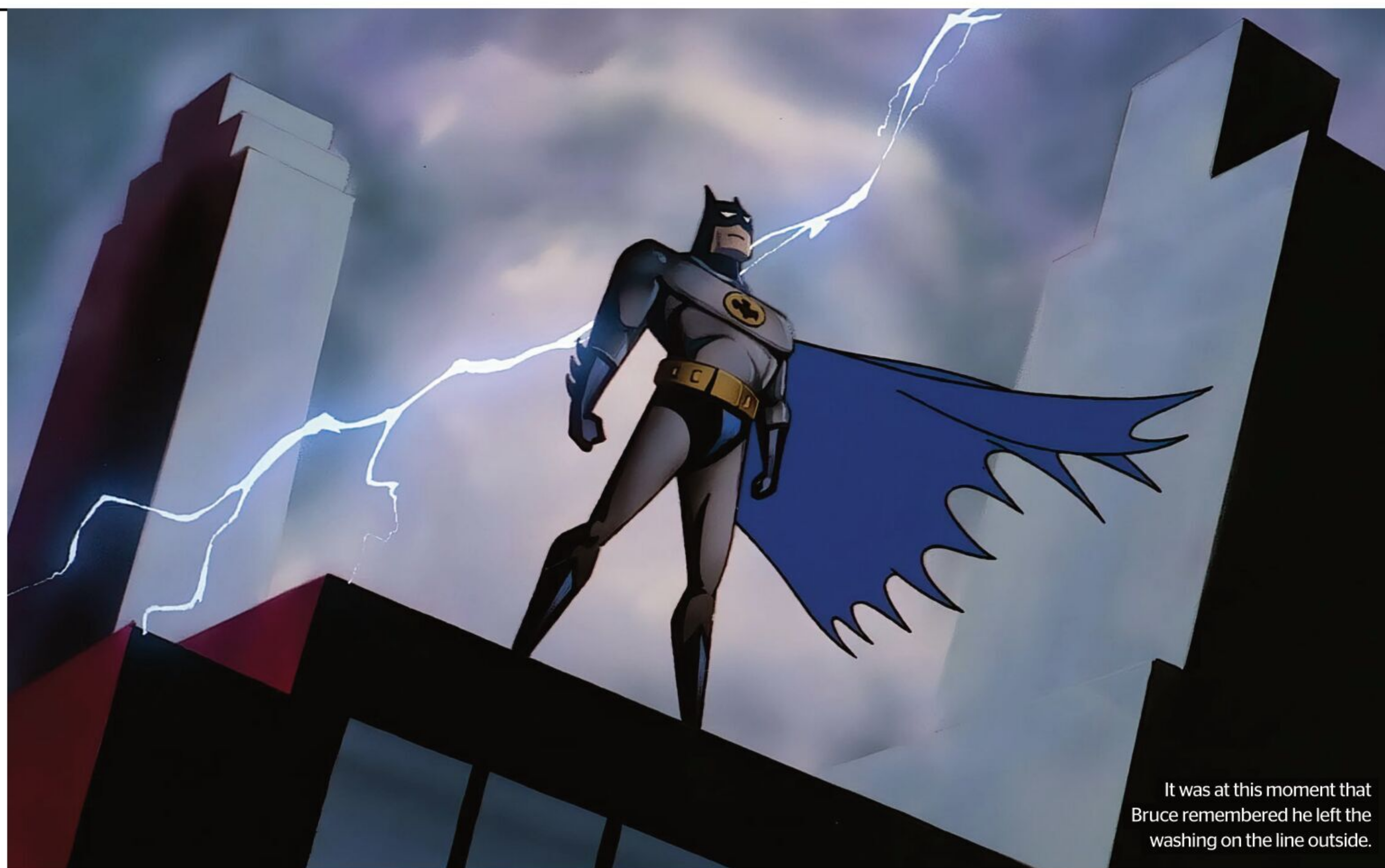
Costner, Connery, De Niro. De Palma, Mamet, Morricone... Few films have this strength in depth before and behind the camera. Yet, as one of the first major Hollywood adapts of a TV series, you can see why the makers of *The Untouchables* had something to prove.

In a trick he'd repeat with 1996's *Mission: Impossible*, Brian De Palma retooled an episodic series as a non-stop thrill ride. *The Untouchables* is big, from the bulked-up menace of Robert De Niro's Al Capone to Ennio Morricone's strident score. David Mamet's juicy dialogue finds the sweet spot between literary prestige and outrageous quotability.

The approach is all the more effective for how it heightens the underdog nature of lawman Eliot Ness' (Kevin Costner) team, little men up against a corrupt, uncaring city. The film made stars of Costner and Andy García, while gifting Sean Connery an Oscar as the grizzled, deadpan veteran teaching Ness how to fight dirty.

And just when you thought it couldn't get any better, De Palma stages one of the all-time great suspense set-pieces. The details (stairs, a pram) are shamelessly robbed from Eisenstein's Soviet classic *Battleship Potemkin*, but the operatic execution is popcorn heaven, another example of this film's playful delight in mixing high and low art. No new extras on this 4K update, alas, but the Steelbook version packs in a poster, art cards and business cards. **SIMON KINNEAR**

THE VERDICT They give you an old TV show, you make a classic movie. That's the De Palma way.



It was at this moment that Bruce remembered he left the washing on the line outside.

CLASSIC TV

BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES

The 'Dark Deco' Knight rises...

1992-95 AVAILABLE ON DVD, BD AND DIGITAL

Swooping onto TV screens in 1992, only a few months after Tim Burton's *Batman Returns* had broken box-office records, *Batman: The Animated Series* wasn't the Caped Crusader's first foray into the world of cartoon shows. But it was by far the best. It was also the most groundbreaking, showing that TV 'toons could be more than glorified toy ads.

Prior to this, kids' animated adventure series had been made on meagre budgets and under restrictive Broadcasting Standards and Practices rules (which even prohibited characters from hitting each other). *BTAS* changed all that – and we have Steven Spielberg to thank for it. In 1989, the filmmaker signed a deal with Warner Bros to produce an animated revival of its iconic Looney Tunes characters, *Tiny Toons Adventures*. Keen to do whatever it took to keep Spielberg happy, Warner Bros started throwing serious money at its animation department. So, when the decision was made to develop a new weekly Batman cartoon, it had the same talent pool and lavish production values to call upon.

BTAS also looked completely different to anything else on TV. Well, how many other kids' cartoons can you name that draw visual inspiration from the likes of 1940s film noirs, *Citizen Kane*, *The Cabinet*

Of Dr. Caligari and Metropolis? The show's distinctive 'Dark Deco' aesthetic became instantly recognisable, lending it a lush cinematic style. Meanwhile, the sleek character designs called back to gorgeous Max Fleischer Superman cartoons of the 1940s.

Matching the show's sophisticated aesthetic was the maturity and depth of its storytelling. Free from some of the censorship restrictions that affected earlier cartoons, writers were not only able to pack storylines with gunplay, explosions and fistfights, they were also able to delve into the psychology of the characters. This extended to Batman's rogues gallery, imbuing the show's villains with emotional depth and believable motivations – a big step away from the 'cartoonish' bad guys of previous animated adventure series.

After 85 episodes and one acclaimed theatrical spin-off (*Mask Of The Phantasm*), *BTAS* ended its run in 1995. But its legacy lives on. The show proved that kids' cartoons didn't have to 'just' be for kids, that the medium could be used to tell intelligent and exciting stories that would satisfy audiences of all ages. And no matter how many brilliant shows have followed in its wake, *Batman: The Animated Series* remains a vital touchstone not only for TV animation, but for superhero stories on screens big and small.

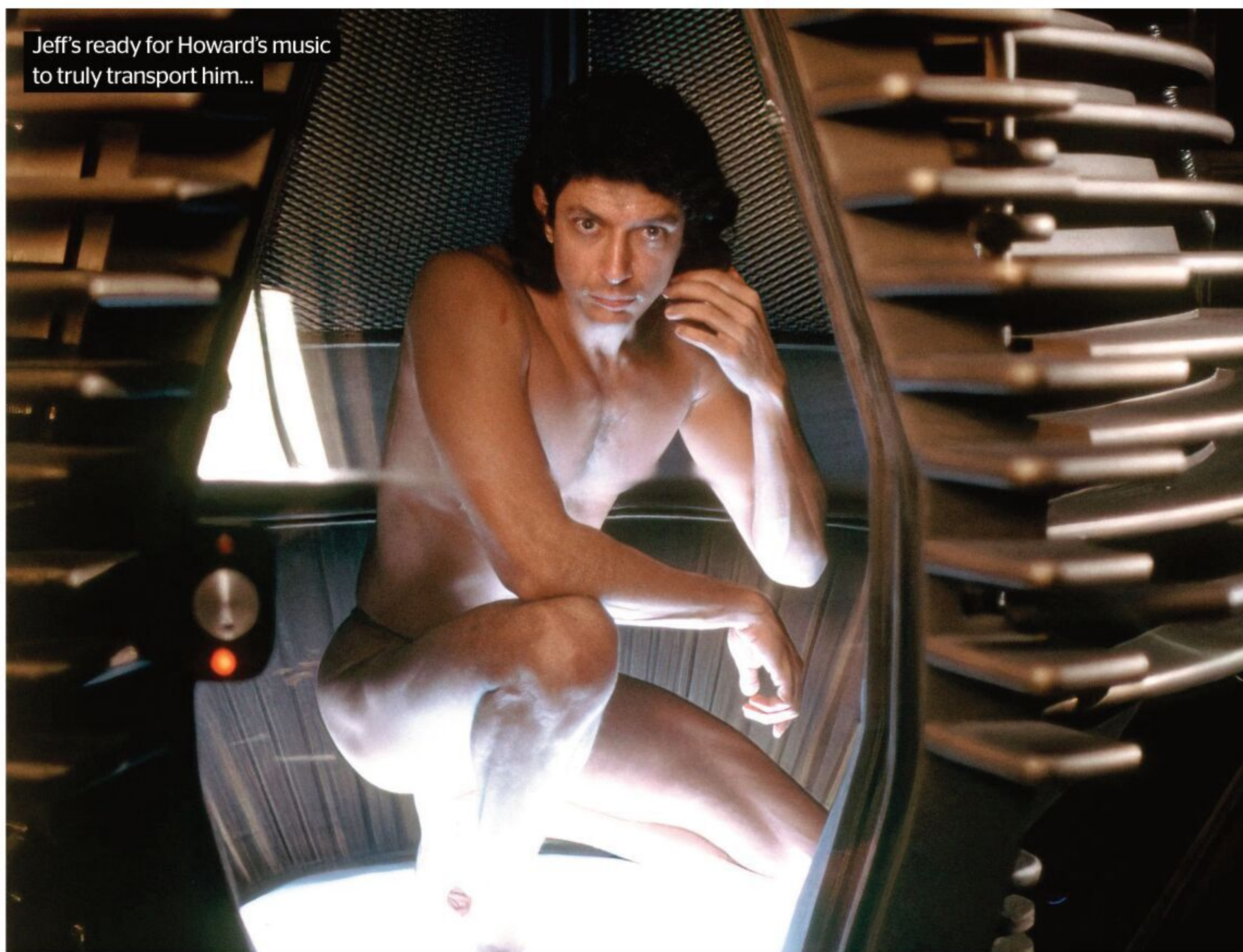
ANTON VAN BEEK



HEART OF ICE S1, 1992

Until this award-winning episode Mr. Freeze was by and large a goofy bad guy nobody took seriously. Paul Dini's 'Heart Of Ice' script changed all that, transforming the previously one-note villain into a tragic figure with a truly affecting backstory. A bravura early example of how ambitious and mature the show's storytelling could be.





CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK THE FLY

HOWARD SHORE, VARESE SARABANDE

When Mel Brooks voiced concerns that David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) was "too much", the veteran producer wasn't fretting about Seth Brundle's grisly mutations. Brooks was questioning a specific piece of music – wasn't it a bit excessive for a shot of a guy walking down the street? Not at all, said Cronenberg. Jeff Goldblum's Brundle was walking to "meet his destiny", argued Cronenberg: "We knew it was operatic, but it was meant to be. And we weren't holding back."

Long before *The Lord Of The Rings*, former *Saturday Night Live* music director Howard Shore brought a tremendous dramatic intensity and intelligence to Cronenberg's films. Between *The Brood*'s Psycho-esque strings, *Scanners*' synth-orchestral maelstroms and *Videodrome*'s seamy abstractions, the duo seemed organically attuned to each other's wavelengths, like separate strands of the same DNA.

For *The Fly*, their combined evolutionary trajectory hit a rarefied pitch. Though the film is effectively a three-hander (plus baboon), it traces an arc from transcendent discovery to ultimate tragedy with heightened universal resonances and no restraint in the gore or emotion. In tune with Cronenberg's shift from art film to the mainstream, Shore delivered a symphonic score of elegant thematic focus and grandeur, brimming with feeling, suspense and horror.

Working with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Shore used the ensemble to full advantage. Between the brassy fanfare's doomy invocations and the ensuing notes of reflection, Shore combines a sense of exploratory inquiry and tenderness with a suggestion that the end is preordained: a suggestion thick with Cronenbergian existential portent.

The score stresses the doomed love-story angle, with the piano-led playfulness of 'Particle Magazine' grounding the bond between Seth and Geena Davis' Ronnie. Later, 'The Street' offers a chillier break-up variant; meanwhile, some experimental sequences suggest Seth's work going horribly askew. And when Shore brings the horror, he brings it hard: all pulverising timpani, crashing strings and apocalyptic brass, 'The Creature' and 'The Ultimate Family' signal a crushed acquiescence to inevitable defeat.

The result enjoyed an extended afterlife. Shore and Cronenberg developed it into an opera in 2008 – an entirely logical development given Shore's epic tonalities. He and Cronenberg have seemed inseparable ever since, their variably beautiful (*Dead Ringers*), heart-rending (*Spider*), jazzy (*Naked Lunch*) and electronic (*Cosmopolis*) collaborations ranking them among the great director/composer couplings. *The Fly* also influenced later horror scores, though Shore's epic arrangements maintain a gravity and grace of their own. When he dived into Cronenberg's plasma pool, he dived deep. **KEVIN HARLEY**



From The King to cartoon underlings...



ELVIS

★★★★★

Not just a jukebox musical, the Baz Luhrmann biopic's soundtrack aligns Presley with his roots and off-shoots generously. Elvis' debts to Black music inform electric mash-ups/covers from Doja Cat, Les Greene and others; Eminem (with CeeLo Green), Kacey Musgraves, Tame Impala, Jack White and newcomer Paravi also excel. Though the strike rate sometimes slips, Austin Butler performs solidly and The King's crown holds firm: a closing brace of live cuts thrills.



MINIONS: THE RISE OF GRU

★★★★★

Tame Impala grace another retro-modern mix-bag, duetting with disco royalty Diana Ross for Gru's hench-miscreants. St. Vincent and BROCKHAMPTON's funk homages are merely dutiful, though Caroline Polachek's dreamy 'Bang Bang' and Thundercat's groovy 'Fly Like An Eagle' rise to the occasion. Melting soft-rock covers from Phoebe Bridgers ('Goodbye To Love') and Weyes Blood ('You're No Good') add touches of class, before the Minions' mirthful 'Cecilia' merrily swipes the show.



EXTRAS



VARIOUS THOR: LOVE AND THUNDER MERCHANDISE

OUT NOW

Something to suit all tastes, whether you're a player (the flashing, vibrating Mjolnir toy), a displayer (the deluxe figurine set, the Pop! vinyls) or hiking round the galaxy to find yourself (the Loungefly mini-backpack à la Mr. Odinson's armour). As for all you fans of Toothgnasher/Toothgrinder, you can now get your goats in Lego, Funko and fluffy-toy form. Hoof it to funkoeurope.com and shopdisney.co.uk.

BOARD GAME REAR WINDOW

OUT NOW

No broken leg required for this adaptation of Hitch's 1954 classic; you'll be kept on your toes trying to suss out if all the strange clues and ominous patterns spell murder. Or it could be that you're just imagining things, which might be a bit of a letdown for some players. Beautifully illustrated in a '50s-throwback fashion, the game comes with a Cluedo-load of bits and bobs including, naturally, a mysterious trunk. Take a discreet peek at funkoeurope.com.



TOY/COLLECTIBLE SANCTUM SANCTORUM LEGO

OUT 1 AUGUST

Following last year's Daily Bugle, Lego extends its Marvel skyline with a new take on Doctor Strange's mystic crib. Weighing in at 2,708 pieces (more than 2.5 times the size of the previous Lego Sanctum), it comprises a ground level, a mid-section library and a top-storey museum of mystical doodads. Culled from various films, the nine minifigures include three Stranges: regular, Sinister and Dead. Now all we need is Avengers Mansion, the X-Mansion, Happy Hogan's condo... Start making building plans at lego.com.



BOARD GAME PARKS AND RECREATION

OUT NOW

A Li'l Sebastian figure! To keep! To display! To love! Forever! Oh, and there's a game attached as well. Pick a Pawnee project and rope in your colleagues – but be sure to take as much credit as possible. It's all steeped in the *Parks And Rec* vibe, from the LOL quotes on every game card to the artwork modelled on Pawnee's historic murals. You can play as one of six characters (got to be Ron, obvs); game ends when Li'l Sebastian is finished eating, like some adorable equine egg-timer. Trot on to funkoeurope.com.



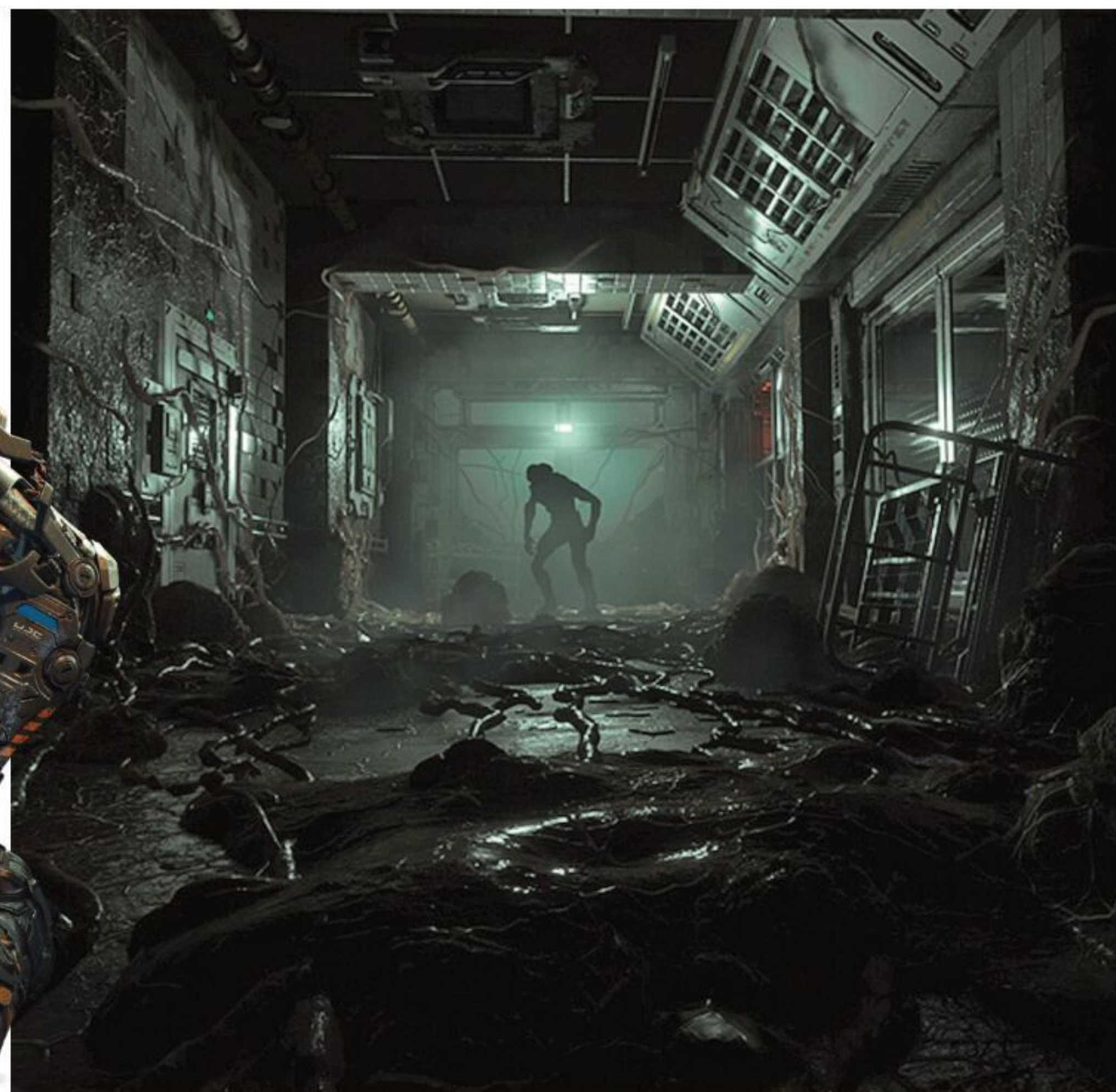
GAMES PREVIEW

The top titles heading button-bashers' way, this year and next... WORDS **CHRIS SCHILLING**

THE CALLISTO PROTOCOL

OUT 2 DECEMBER PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES S/X

That title barely hints at the nightmarish scenes within. Inspired by K-horror and the New French Extremity (director Glen Schofield has cited Pascal Laugier's original *Martyrs* as a key text), the team behind the *Dead Space* series has returned for a spiritual successor that ups the ante for gore and body horror. When a prison colony on Jupiter's moon is overrun by cannibalistic mutants, resourceful con Jacob (Josh Duhamel) must try to stay alive while finding out whether the facility's warden was responsible. Expect flickering lights, sudden jolts and grisly deaths in abundance: some of these monstrosities, we're shown, are capable of biting a human head in two.



HORIZON: CALL OF THE MOUNTAIN

OUT 2023 PSVR 2

Sony wasn't yet ready to reveal when its next-generation VR hardware will be available, but on this evidence it can't come soon enough. This first-person spin-off relegates the series' usual protagonist Aloy to a supporting role; here, you play as Ryas, a warrior recently released from prison on the condition that he'll scale a nearby peak to investigate why the dinosaur-like robots from the main games have become aggressive. The views are stunning as you leap between handholds, climb ropes and use your pitons to negotiate ziplines. Ryas' bow, meanwhile, comes in handy to fend off any machines that stall your ascent.



EXOPRIMAL

OUT 2023 PC, PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES S/X

If you'd rather face a different kind of prehistoric threat, look no further than Capcom's multiplayer actioner. This isn't the successor to *Dino Crisis* that many expected, but an exhilarating fusion of *Lost Planet* and *Earth Defence Force*. At the behest of a powerful AI, two teams of five players – each piloting cutting-edge exosuits – compete in combat tests, facing down rampaging raptors, Ankylosaurs and the occasional T-rex. Cooperation is key, but sometimes your hyper-intelligent host will pit you against one another, before raising the stakes by introducing souped-up 'saurs that pack an explosive surprise.

KRAFTON, BETHESDA, DEVOLVER DIGITAL, SQUARE ENIX, CAPCOM, SONY, XBOX GAME STUDIOS



STREET FIGHTER 6

OUT 2023 PC, PS4/5, XBOX SERIES S/X

The fighting-game scene has stagnated in recent years. New releases have steadily catered to a dwindling audience of expert players, in turn becoming impenetrable to newcomers. Capcom's seminal series is no exception, but the developer is seeking to return to the heyday of arcade classic *Street Fighter II*, with a modern control scheme designed to lower the barrier of entry, as well as a more expansive single-player adventure mode to attract new audiences. Its refined art style makes for a serious spectacle, combining more realistic character models with vibrant explosions of ink and paint as powerful attacks connect.



FINAL FANTASY XVI

OUT 2023 PS5

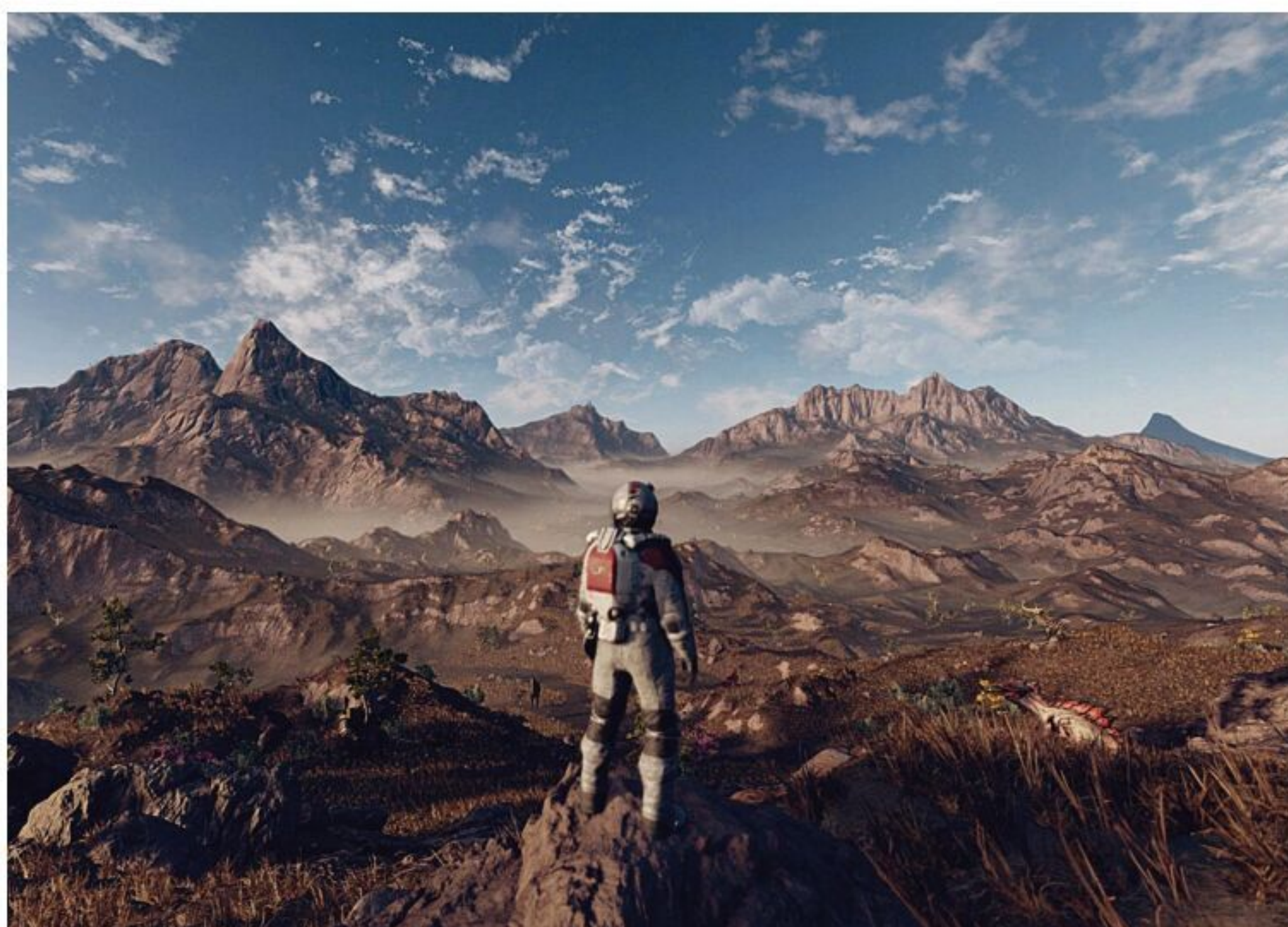
The popular Japanese RPG series has adopted a European high-fantasy theme for its newest entry, with a largely British voice cast, a storyline that nods towards Tolkien and a protagonist called Clive. It's another step away from its turn-based origins: encounters bear the fingerprints of combat designer Ryota Suzuki, whose work on the *Devil May Cry* series is evident in the dynamic, fast-paced skirmishes. One reason *Final Fantasy* continues to bely its name is its willingness to experiment with tone and structure – but the latest footage seemed designed to win over concerned fans, with familiar summons given a spectacular makeover.



THE PLUCKY SQUIRE

OUT 2023 PC, PS5, SWITCH, XBOX SERIES S/X

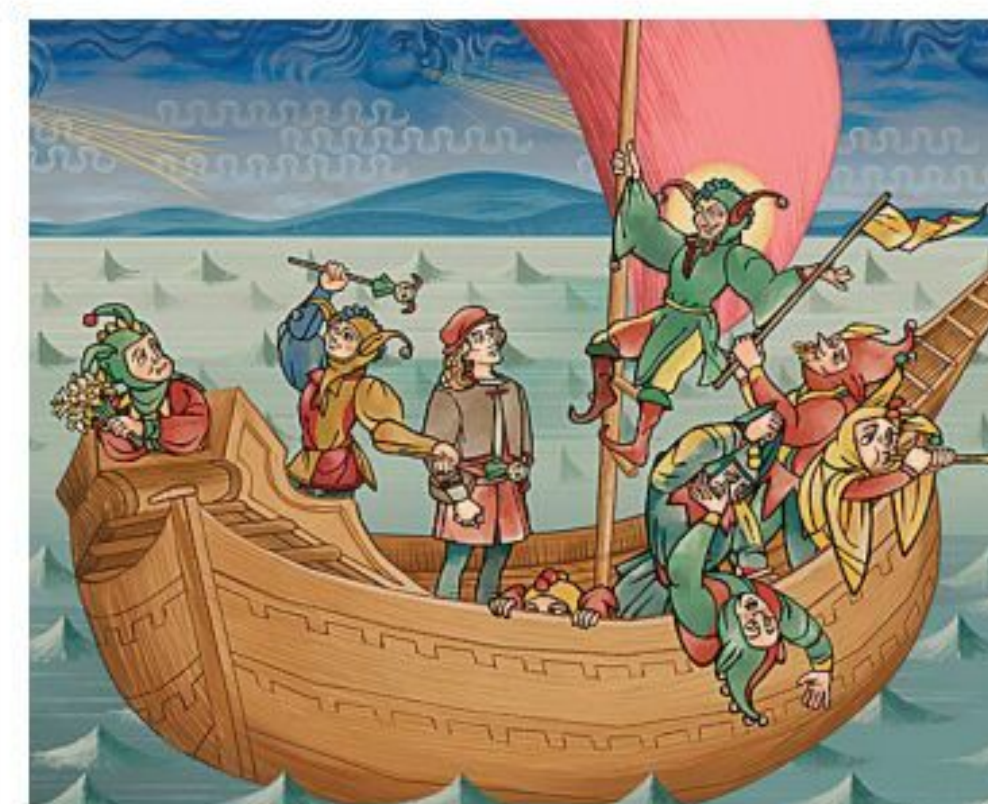
The first game from All Possible Futures, the studio James Turner recently co-founded with veteran designer Jonathan Biddle, turned heads on its reveal. Each summer delivers at least one breakout indie hit, and *The Plucky Squire* generated the most buzz with easily the biggest 'wow' moment of the various company showcases. Presenting itself as a whimsical 2D adventure set within the pages of a child's storybook, it showed hero Jot take a bold leap off the page and into a beautifully rendered 3D playroom.



STARFIELD

OUT 2023 PC, XBOX SERIES S/X

Microsoft saved the biggest for last in its summer showcase: Bethesda's ambitious sci-fi RPG boasts more than 100 star systems with 1,000 planets, all explorable. Yet it was swiftly dubbed 'No Man's Skyrim' on social media for its similarities to Hello Games' ever-improving space adventure, while a shootout in an empty research lab hardly showed the game in its best light. Still, the studio's flair for atmospheric world-building was evident in the exterior scenes, while its customisation tools for building outposts and personalising your own ship look impressive: this is one intergalactic adventure you can really make your own.



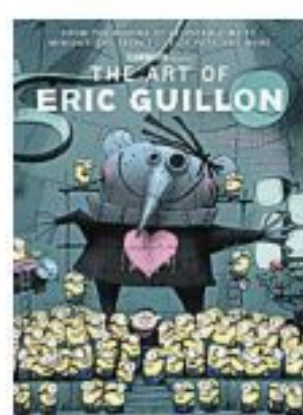
PENTIMENT

OUT NOVEMBER PC, XBOX SERIES S/X

This is a murder mystery with a twist: the perpetrator is never canonically revealed. Set in 16th-century Bavaria, it casts you as artist Andreas Maler, who decides to investigate when his best friend is accused of the crime. Through conversation, exploration and puzzle-solving, you'll dive into a world riven by social unrest before deciding who's guilty – or, perhaps, who's most deserving of punishment. Clearly a labour of love for designer Josh Sawyer and art director Hannah Kennedy, it has a striking look inspired by woodcut prints and historical manuscripts.



Cute lil' critters special!



THE ART OF ERIC GUILLON

★★★★★

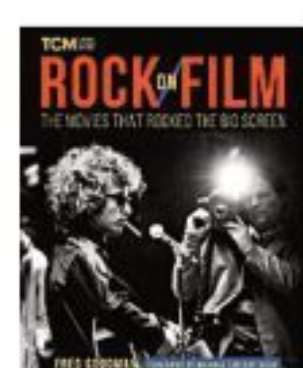
As character designer/art director on Illumination's biggest hits, Eric Guillon is the man to thank – or blame – for the Minions' domination of meme culture (and your gran's Facebook wall). Those pill-shaped acolytes and their supervillain master take up the bulk of this handsome art book, but there are also chapters devoted to *The Lorax*, *The Secret Life Of Pets* and *Sing*. Packed with previously unseen illustrations and concept art, it shows off not only Guillon's knack for characters, but his world (and gadget)-building skills too, with intricate cityscapes alongside pics of baby Gru. Amid the sumptuous images, writer Ben Croll serves up chunks of production history, biography and making-of trivia. **JOEL HARLEY**



THE MANDALORIAN COLLECTOR'S EDITION: S2 VOL. 1

★★★★★

Striking a balance between high-def production stills and slick concept art, this *Star Wars Insider* spin-off allows Mando (and Grogu) fans a better look at moments and characters that were all too fleeting in live action. Lacks deep insight, but lovely to look at. **JOEL HARLEY**



BOOKS ROCK ON FILM

★★★★★ FRED GOODMAN RUNNING PRESS

What do movies know of rock? Inspired to ask this question after seeing Frank Zappa's "extreme" *200 Motels* as a teenager, former *Rolling Stone* editor Fred Goodman provides answers in his readable, rigorous and wide-ranging account of 'The Movies That Rocked The Big Screen'.

Introductory reflections on Elvis, The Beatles and Bob Dylan show how this holy trinity established rock/film templates for others to follow, before Goodman unpacks his core idea: it's not all about the music, man. Goodman sees rock as a state of mind – a route map for life, as the best rock movies understand. Intended to be "illuminating rather than definitive", Goodman assembles a 52-strong compendium of

crowd-pleasers and obscurities to prove the point – and with double-feature options nudging his movie count to 100-plus, the results aren't far off definitive.

From punk to Prince, reggae to The Runaways, hip-hop to heavy metal: wherever the needle drops, Goodman's essays land with passion, wit and wisdom. He's good on how *Stop Making Sense* understands rock's theatrical powers, persuasive on *Viva Las Vegas*' sexual sparks, *Straight Outta Compton*'s harsh truths or *Almost Famous*' heart-warming joys. Interviewees add amiable and analytical insight, including Cameron Crowe, Penelope Spheeris and John Waters, who summarises the book's pitch nicely. For Goodman, music isn't just a soundtrack, much less wallpaper. "Music," says Waters, "is how you write the story." **KEVIN HARLEY**

ALL OF THE MARVELS

★★★★★

DOUGLAS WOLK PROFILE BOOKS



Paperback edition of comics guru Wolk's quixotic-slash-enviable mission, to read *all* of Marvel's superhero comics since '61, "from *Alpha Flight* to *Omega The Unknown*". Keeping the pace spry, it's organised not chronologically but by character and theme, finding connections between issues published years apart. Some of the chapters – a history of pre-MCU movies, for example – offer more breadth than depth. But Wolk's jaunty prose makes good on his assertion, "I had an absolutely great time." **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

THE AVENGERS VOL.1 1963-1965

★★★★★

STAN LEE ET AL TASCHEN



Taschen's Marvel Comics Library expands with the first 20 issues of the comic that paved the way for the MCU, with its team-ups, bust-ups (Hulk leaves in Issue 2) and revised line-ups. Faithfully reproducing the original pages, this not-inexpensive item comes with a few arty-farty filler spreads but also an excellent essay by comics vet Kurt Busiek, who casts a loving yet critical eye over the collected stories, including the whole concept of who's avenging what and why. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

THE ART OF LIGHTYEAR

★★★★★

VARIOUS CHRONICLE



The formula for Pixar's Art Of books is well established: coffee-table-ready tomes laden with art (digital, hand-drawn, and Lego), annotated with quotes from key crew members. Director Angus MacLane's intro lays out the film's "cinematic chunk" design aesthetic, which is illustrated handsomely over the ensuing pages. Close-up graphic details delight, but it's a shame it doesn't go into spoilery detail on Zurg, or explore a little less charted territory. **MATT MAYTUM**

CINEMA CELEBRITY AND DEBATER: YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...



IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH
THE GRAY MAN



Q In *The Gray Man*, Sierra Six is stabbed and treats himself at a vet's with dressing and an EpiPen. A shot in the dark?

A Dr. Kate Scoffings, GP

EpiPen is a trade name for an epinephrine (adrenaline) auto-injector pen. It contains 2mg adrenaline for intramuscular injection. There's nothing else in it – no pain relief. In a case of a severe allergic reaction, it is given into a muscle and affects the whole body by constricting blood vessels, therefore increasing blood pressure and reducing the swelling associated with the reaction. If you inject an epiPen when not having an allergic reaction, it will sting, and you will probably get a fast heartbeat, but that's generally all. If one was stabbed in the side, a shot wouldn't be required apart from perhaps a tetanus booster. In any knife injury, wrapping/pressure on the wound is most important.

In this situation – given Six is certain it hasn't hit his kidney or liver (!) – the main thing is to stop bleeding out and hope any internal bleeding is stemmed by pressure. Obviously he really needs to go to the hospital to get checked for where the blade has hit and whether it has caused internal bleeding. It is notoriously difficult to assess how deep knife wounds are. Had Six headed straight for A&E, they would explore the wound, scan him for internal bleeding and cover for infection with broad-spectrum antibiotics and a tetanus booster shot at the very least.

Also, your average vet wouldn't stock an epiPen – you need different doses for different size animals, so it would be something they would get in for a specific pet. They cost a lot of money (roughly \$600 for two) so they are unlikely to keep them in “just in case”.

VERDICT BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies...
WITH MARVEL-LOUS TITLES



01	FURY 2011	\$211.8M
02	VALKYRIE 2008	\$201.5M
03	THE THING 2011	\$31.5M
04	BLACK WIDOW 1987	\$25.2M
05	KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN 1985	\$17M
06	GET CARTER 2000	\$19.4M
07	VISION QUEST 1985	\$13M
08	STANLEY & IRIS 1990	\$5.8M
09	THE ICEMAN 2012	\$4.6M
10	THE INVISIBLE WOMAN 2013	\$4M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA



WHAT? Holly Golightly is a good-time girl who falls for her new neighbour (no, not Mr Yunioshi) in a brownstone apartment in New York in *Breakfast At Tiffany's*.

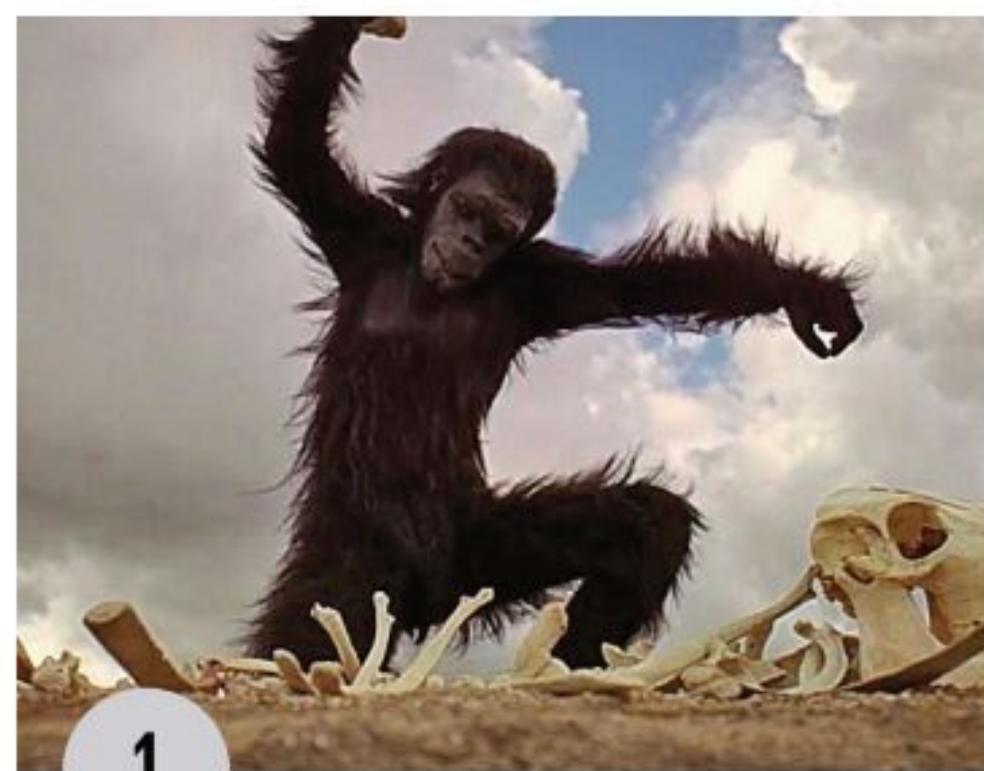
WHERE? 169 East 71st Street and Lexington Avenue, Manhattan, New York.

GO? This private residence no longer has the candy-stripe awnings from the film – nor the interior, which was filmed on the Paramount backlot in LA.

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

GRAPHIC MATCH CUTS

One of those things is just like the other...



1

2001

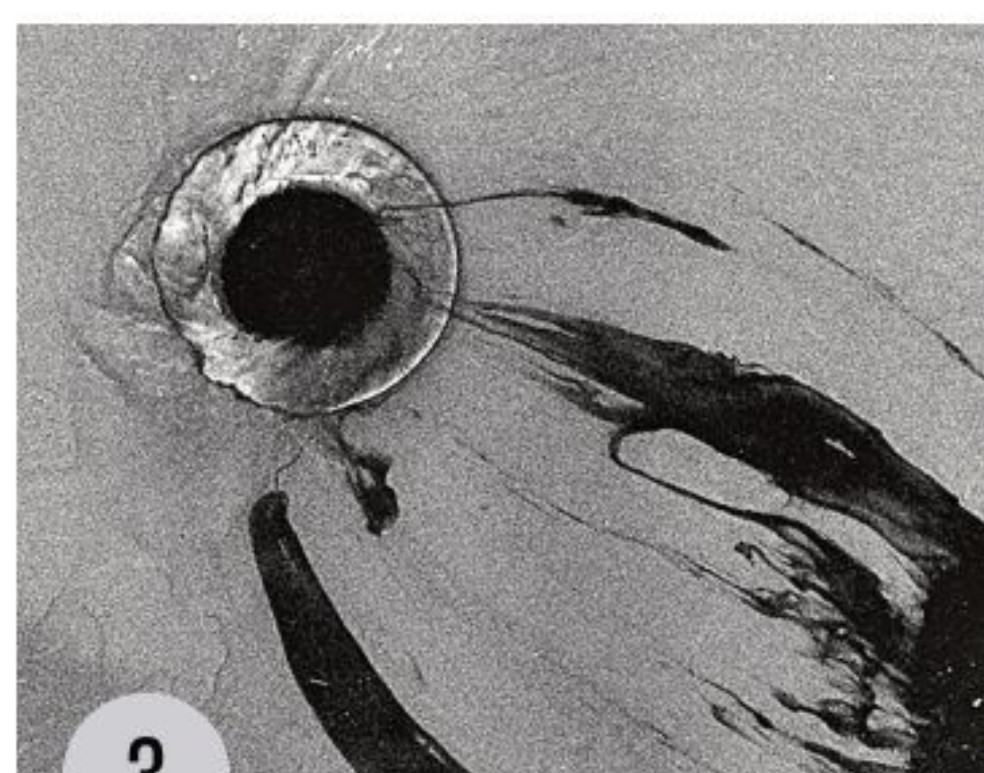
The most famous match cut in movie history, as a bone tossed in anger by an ape becomes an orbiting space bomb. Millions of years have passed in the blink of an eye, but man's destructive impulses are yet to evolve.



2

UN CHIEN ANDALOU

Talking of a blink of an eye... Surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel cuts from a straight razor about to slice a woman's eyeball to a thin sliver of cloud scudding across the moon. It's a comment on the spectatorship of violence, natch.



3

PSYCHO

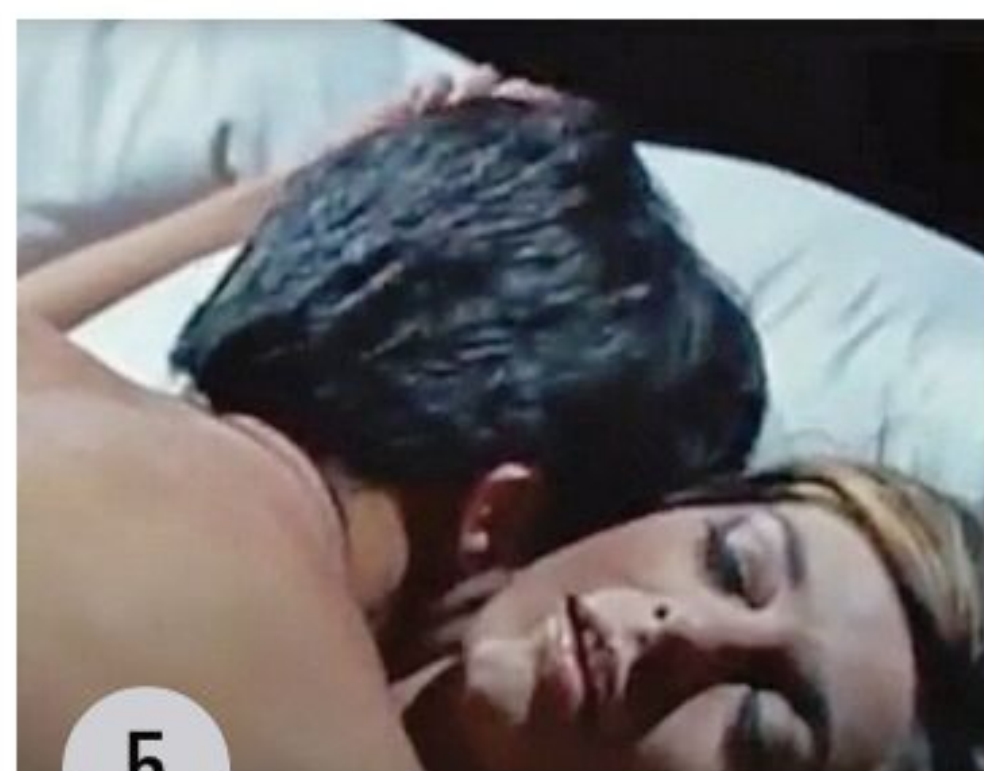
Marion Crane is cut to death in Psycho's famous shower scene, as 52 edits replicate the force of the slashing knife. But it's the match cut from blood swirling down the plughole to Marion's sightless, unblinking eye that underlines the finality of it all.



4

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

River Phoenix's teenage Indy has a rip-roaring adventure to kick off this third instalment, then lowers his head and slides on a fedora. When he looks up again, it's Harrison Ford flashing his signature smirk.



5

THE GRADUATE

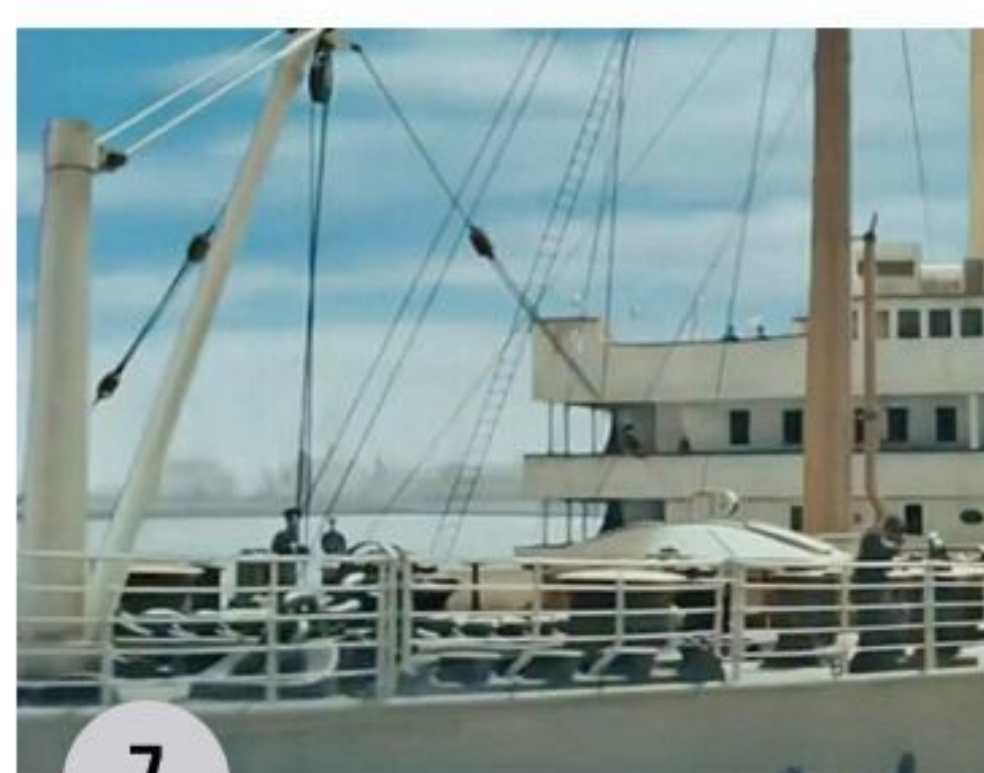
Dustin Hoffman's disillusioned Benjamin Braddock swims listlessly in the pool, treading water on life, then flops onto a lilo only to land on cinema's most celebrated cougar, Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft), in bed. Sun, sex and satire.



6

UP

Animated movies love a match cut – they can, after all, control every detail of the frame – but few deliver the emotional wallop of the dissolve from Carl clutching a balloon at his wife's funeral to him standing outside his dark, empty house.



7

TITANIC

And it's not just animation – CGI can get in on the match-cut action, too. Just look at how an uninterrupted pan cuts from tracing the murky, rusted bow of the submerged Titanic in 1996 to it gleaming above the ocean in 1912.



8

GREASE

The T-Birds prance and dance to 'Greased Lightning' as they fix up a beat-up 1948 Ford Deluxe convertible. By the song's end, they're draped over a pristine hotrod – until a match cut has them lounging on the original rustbucket.



9

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

Peter O'Toole's Lawrence is to be transferred from Cairo to the Arab Bureau. He lights a cigar and blows out the match, and we cut to the sun rising over the Arabian desert. Yes, it's a match cut using an actual match.



10

CITIZEN KANE

Welles' masterpiece opens with an exterior shot of the titular character's palatial home, Xanadu. A lit bedroom window occupies the same part of the frame while a series of dissolves tour the estate before entering the bedroom to find Kane breathing his last. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

CAR FOR SALE



FILM: CHRISTINE
VEHICLE: PLYMOUTH FURY
YEAR: 1958

1958 Plymouth Fury in blood red with white-wall tyres and all original features. Originally a fixer-upper, now a vintage classic with 93,475 miles on the clock. Plays retro songs on radio no matter the era, with a pristine interior (seller strongly advised to not spill anything on seats). No dings or scratches on bodywork due to regeneration treatment. Fast racer (outruns most bullies and vandals). There is nothing finer than being behind the wheel of your own car... so why not take her for a spin?

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HINDSIGHT CORNER

JAVIER BARDEM

THE LAST FACE

May 2016

"We had a very good team around us..."

May 2022

"It was a great disaster. It's good to come to a festival like Cannes and be booed and be reminded that what we do can be horrific, because otherwise, we think of ourselves too highly."

FLOP CULTURE



LEGEND

In 1985, Ridley Scott's fluttery fantasy died a death. Was it because he couldn't see the wooden actors for the trees?

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

After *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott wanted to make a lighter fantasy, revising earlier plans to adapt *Tristan And Isolde*. With *Risky Business* pants-dancer Tom Cruise leading, *Legend* would merge Scott's world-building dazzle with diversified audience appeal. And horny villains.

What went wrong?

Scott began work on *Legend* with novelist/scriptwriter William Hjortsberg in 1981. The director envisioned a cross between Cocteau's *Beauty And The Beast*, Warner's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Disney's *Fantasia*, channelled into a genre-savvy myth-mash of folk tales, Arthur Rackham imagery and primal instincts. After *Blade Runner* flopped, though, his confidence wilted. On a huge forest set on Pinewood's 007 stage, Scott devoted more time to lighting, setting and wafty duck-down than plot and performance. Like the bubbles floating across the screen, the narrative lacked weight; meanwhile, Cruise's rabbit-in-headlights lead cried out for proper direction. Then the forest set burnt down. Confidence shredded, Scott was driven by poor test screenings

(with, he claimed, giggly stoners attending) to cut fiercely, and to replace Jerry Goldsmith's lush score with Tangerine Dream's modish music for US audiences. "I kind of lost it," he later conceded.

Redeeming feature

Projecting through Rob Bottin's impressive prosthetics, Tim Curry's performance as Darkness is so amusingly overblown it makes his Dr. Frank-N-Furter look like a cocktail sausage. Elsewhere, flashes of beauty offset Scott's more kitschy visuals.

What happened next?

Released after delays, *Legend* was damned by critics as goblin gubbins and pulled from US theatres after two weeks. Both adaptable, Scott turned to the more grounded *Someone To Watch Over Me* and Cruise achieved *Top Gun* lift-off. Meanwhile, '80s fantasy movies appeared decreasingly bankable.

Should it be remade?

The script went through 15-ish revisions over four-ish years. Multiple cuts/edits exist. And *Legend* still creaks. Let the unicorns be.

KEVIN HARLEY

BUDGET

\$24.5m

BOX OFFICE

\$15.5m

AWARDS

1

TF STAR RATING

★ ★ ★

ROTTEN TOMATOES

40%

Is The Power Of
The Movies diminished
on the small screen?



IS IT JUST ME OR IS STREAMING NO BIG-SCREEN SUBSTITUTE?



JAMES MOTTRAM
@JAMESMOTTRAM

Don't get me wrong. I'm not a Luddite wishing for 'the good ol' days', when we only had four TV channels and movies took months to arrive on fuzzy VHS tapes. Change is good, progress is inevitable. And there are lots of reasons to praise streamers like Netflix, Prime Video and Apple TV+. Touch-of-a-button convenience for one. No more seeking through piles of DVDs for that copy of *Top Gun* you know you've got somewhere. Then there's that vast array of choice. And let's face it, when cinemas closed during the pandemic, streaming kept us sane.

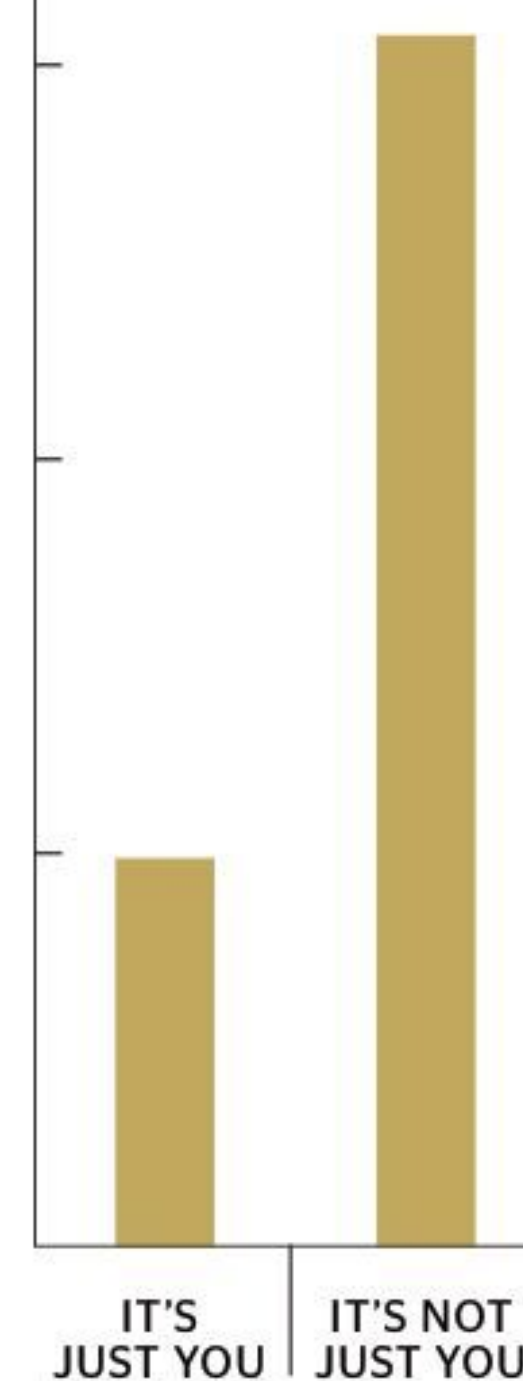
You also can't fault the tastes of these filmmaker-friendly companies.

Without Netflix, Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman* would not have been made. Same goes for Jane Campion's *The Power Of The Dog*. At a time when studios are betting all their chips on event movies, auteurs are finding backing with these digital disrupters.

Yet if there's one thing lockdown reinforced, it's just how unique the cinema experience is. True, some movie houses leave a lot to be desired, patrons can be annoying, and it can be expensive, what with travel, babysitting, etc.

Sharing a movie in the dark with strangers is irreplaceable, though. It takes effort to leave your couch, but when you do, it's so much more rewarding. I don't care how good your swanky HD cinema set-up is, the inevitable distractions (doorbells, phones, pets) mean you're never as

OFFICE-OMETER
THE TF STAFF
VERDICT IS IN!



immersed in a movie at home as you are in a cinema. Artistically, it's also wrong. As Denis Villeneuve told *Total Film*, watching *Dune* on your TV is like driving a "speedboat in your bathtub". There's also no fanfare or anticipation surrounding an on-demand watch, right down to the end credits getting abruptly cut off.

I know streamers have introduced some viewers to films they might otherwise not see, which is a good thing. But we need to re-embrace the medium of cinema quick-sharp, and not just for Bond and Batman. Movie houses are like dining in a Michelin-star restaurant. But streaming? It's the entertainment equivalent of a fast-food drive-through. Or is it just me?

Share your reaction at www.gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and Twitter.



LAST TIME IS PACINO THE DEFINITIVE DEVIL?

Darren Nicholls

You clearly haven't seen the *South Park* movie then. Satan at his best.

Tanya von Mittenwald

No one does dramatic, screaming

monologues like Pacino, and *Devil's Advocate* proves that.

Norman Morrow

Pacino plays the role really well in this, but De Niro in *Angel Heart* will


never be bettered.

Marty Schwartz

What, no love for Vincent Price as Mr. Scratch in 1957's *The Story Of Mankind*?

FILM **BUFF**





1940-2022

JAMES CAAN

The *Godfather* is primarily borne along by its battery of excellent performances, two of them by Coppola's 'regulars' Robert Duvall and James Caan," said the *Sight And Sound* review upon the film's 1972 release, and it is as Michael Corleone's older brother Sonny, famously obliterated in a storm of 140 squibs, that the Bronx-born actor will forever be remembered.

Caan's relationship with director Francis Ford Coppola was key to his career, the pair meeting as classmates at Hofstra University and collaborating on drama *The Rain People* (1969) before *The Godfather* proved a commercial and artistic smash. Caan had appeared on Broadway and in plenty of TV shows and films during the 1960s – Howard Hawks cast him in racing movie *Red Line 7000* (1965) and opposite John Wayne and Robert Mitchum in laconic western *El Dorado* (1966) – but it was Francis who forged him, and who gave Caan the lead role in Vietnam drama *Gardens Of Stone* (1987) after the actor had been absent from the screen for four years, his career derailed by the death of his sister and drugs.

Before his partying took its toll, Caan had parlayed his *Godfather* success into a credible run of movies – *The Gambler*, *Freebie And The Bean* (both 1974), *Funny Lady*, *Rollerball* (both 1975) and Michael Mann's philosophical crime thriller *Thief* (1981) – though it is hard not to ponder what might have been had he not turned down *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and *Kramer Vs. Kramer*. After his comeback in *Gardens Of Stone*, he worked tirelessly. His standout roles were entrapped author Paul Sheldon being terrorised by number one fan Annie Wilkes in Rob Reiner's *Misery* (1990), ambiguous patriarch Uncle Frank in James Gray's mournful, morally complex crime drama *The Yards* (2000), and gangster The Big Man in Lars von Trier's Brechtian parable *Dogville* (2003). On an altogether lighter note, he excelled as Will Ferrell's businessman dad in Christmas classic *Elf* (2003).

Caan worked steadily until his death, aged 82. Married four times, he is survived by five children, including actor Scott Caan. The Hollywood tributes marking his passing were led, naturally, by Coppola: "Jimmy was someone who stretched through my life longer and closer than any motion picture figure I've ever known... His films and the many great roles he played will never be forgotten." **JAMIE GRAHAM**

SHUTTERSTOCK

BEHIND THE SCENES

GIVING CREDIT

Saluting the behind-the-scenes talent making movie magic.

POLLY BENNETT MOVEMENT COACH AND CHOREOGRAPHER

Brit Polly Bennett helped coach Rami Malek to an Oscar-winning performance as Freddie Mercury in *Bohemian Rhapsody* and her excellent work with Austin Butler can be seen in *Elvis*. She tells *Buff* how she teaches performers to walk like a horse and scream with complete abandon.

How did you get involved in coaching Austin Butler to be Elvis?

I got asked by a couple of actors who were auditioning for Elvis – the only person that didn't ask me was Austin [laughs]. It was actually once he got the role – he made a request, because he'd seen Rami Malek talk about the work that I had done with him on *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

How did you work with him to get Elvis' movements?

Every day, we had our own rehearsal schedule. The work that I do is to try to find out why movements happen. It's history. It's heritage. Always, what I was saying to Austin, is that you have to turn it into something practical. There's nothing playable in just copying. A lot of our first week together, we walked. And, of course, Austin was chomping at the bit to get onto the stage. And it was the same with Rami – he really wanted to learn Live Aid. And I was like, "There's no point doing those things

because they're a spontaneous thing to happen." They need to understand everything that he is, leading up to that moment.

How did you get started?

I was a dancer, and then I started acting. I joined the National Youth Theatre when I was 15. I got into drama school, and knew it wasn't quite the right thing for me so I went off to Edinburgh University, and did Art History. I choreographed at university, and that took me into working in TV production, where I was working on an advert as a production assistant. The model that they were using couldn't walk in time to music so I spoke to her, and found out that she likes horse-riding. And so I invited her to walk as a horse. Suddenly, she could walk in time. She could do the things that were being asked of her. Because that rapidly bridged between what she knew, and what was being asked of her. That led to other coaching and I got my first film job with *Stan And Ollie*. Now I coach Premier League football coaches, the staff at The Fat Duck restaurant, actors in plays, actors in movies...

What's been your proudest moment so far?

I was brought on to coach Elvis on *Elvis*, but I ended up sort of working with every cast member – [Alton Mason as] Little Richard, and Yola, playing Rosetta Tharpe, and Shonka Dukureh, playing Big Mama Thornton. And all the screaming girls in the film did workshops with me, because the screaming is so specific to Elvis. This was guttural, uncorseting, freeing, intense, fantastical screaming. He made them abandon themselves. But without doubt, the proudest moment of my entire life was coordinating the Las Vegas show when Elvis comes down into the audience, and he ends up kissing lots of women as he travels around the auditorium. That was just



Polly Bennett worked closely with Rami Malek to perfect his portrayal of Freddie Mercury.

BEHIND THE SCENES

'This was guttural, uncorseting, freeing, intense, fantastical screaming. He made them abandon themselves'

really special; to both be responsible for Austin, and 300 extras – where they were going, where they were moving so they could do it over and over again. And also, for Covid reasons, we needed to track who was kissing him [laughs].

What would you say to someone who wanted to get into this?

There are courses where you can study movement or movement direction. I did a masters in movement studies at a drama school. But that didn't teach me how to do *this*. It taught me that I wanted to do it, and it gave me the space and time to think about it. But the biggest thing is to watch things, and watch people. There's no methodology. My way of understanding movement is because I was a dancer, and because sometimes I was too exuberant in my ballet, and I got told off! **JANE CROWTHER**

ELVIS IS IN CINEMAS NOW.



Even Austin Butler's smooches were carefully choreographed.

VANGELIS

The running man...

CHILD PRODIGY

Born Evangelos Odysseas Papathanassiou, in Agria, Greece, in 1943, Vangelis did not take long to revel in his time. He made music on his family piano aged four, showing experimental instincts by using unconventional adornments – radio fuzz, nails, kitchenware. He later embraced rock/jazz, forming the band The Forminx; when they disbanded, he began scoring for films including *My Brother, The Traffic Policeman* (1963), *5,000 Lies* (1966) and *Vortex* (1967).

NATURAL FEELING

Moving to Paris, Vangelis formed psych-jazz-prog band Aphrodite's Child with singer Demis Roussos, who later contributed to *Blade Runner's* score. When they split, Vangelis made high-drama solo albums while synthesising experiment and feeling in scores for films including *Sex-Power* (1970). His soundtrack work continued with pioneering music for Frédéric Rossif's nature docs, including *L'Opéra Sauvage* (1979); from these, 'L'Enfant' featured in *The Year Of Living Dangerously* (1982).

ELECTRONIC PIONEER

Relocating to London, Vangelis built a studio (the 'laboratory') in his Marble Arch flat, experimented with electronic music, and formed a band with prog-rock singer Jon Anderson. Hits followed, but it was Vangelis' triumphant theme for sports film *Chariots Of Fire* (1981) that rocketed him to global acclaim, banking an Oscar, an extended stay of life in sporting ceremonies and a Mr. Bean skit at 2012's London Olympics.

OFF-WORLD DREAMER

Alongside a tense, melancholy score for Costa-Gavras' *Missing*, Vangelis made history in 1982, innovating on the fledgling Yamaha CS-80 to sculpt the sonic world of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. While offscreen disputes left the music unreleased for a time, its mystique and influence grew. Vangelis reteamed with Scott for a gorgeous and unconventional score to 1492: *Conquest Of Paradise* (1992).

SPACE EXPLORER

While other scores included *The Bounty* (1984) and *Bitter Moon* (1992), Vangelis rejected the 2001 sequel *2010* (1984). But he showed a passion for space/science with music for Nasa and the ESA. His late career stretched from Greece (*Alexander*, 2004) to the great beyond, with music for 2018's Stephen Hawking memorial beamed to a black hole. Audible in films/composers from *Drive* to *Oneohtrix Point Never*, Vangelis' questing influence outlives the composer, who passed away in May this year, aged 79. **KEVIN HARLEY**

KEY SCORES



CHARIOTS OF FIRE 1981

★★★★★

Vangelis delivered an infectious score for Hugh Hudson's sports pic. The sweeping 20-minute title track outpaces the hit-single version beautifully.



BLADE RUNNER 1982

★★★★★

Much sampled by artists seeking to evoke future unease, Vangelis' classic is rapturously integrated scoring: deep, dirty, heartfelt and dynamic.



1492: CONQUEST OF PARADISE

1992 ★★★★★

Reuniting with Scott, Vangelis delivered epic, evocative scoring. The brooding title theme has been much used by other trailers and sporting occasions.



ALEXANDER 2004

★★★★★

Though Oliver Stone's film misfired, Vangelis' score splices choral/orchestral/synthesised music with heroic grace and grandeur.

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INTERMISSION

A WRITER TAKES PAUSE TO CONSIDER...

How Ms. Marvel finally represents her inner superhero on screen.



ASHANTI OMKAR
@ASHANTIOMKAR

As a South Asian child, I grew up thinking Brown people existed only in Indian cinema with storylines I struggled to relate to. I loved superheroes and comics but couldn't see myself in them – my favourites. I loved superheroes like Superman and Batman and comics like *Asterix* and *Tintin*, but they were all white male leads created by, well, white males. OK, so I'd seen some diversity in Eartha Kitt playing Catwoman fabulously in the retro 1966 *Batman* TV show and yes, she was celebratory, brave and motivated – but she was a one-off for a very long time. And despite Asians being the largest diaspora in the world, we remained largely underserved in mainstream media, too often depicted as marginalised immigrants or magical minorities. IT nerds, store keepers, taxi drivers, terrorists...

While *The Mindy Project*, *Never Have I Ever* and *Fresh Off The Boat*, with central Asian characters, have been helping change the landscape slowly for me, it wasn't until 2014 that I finally found my superhero. My husband, an avid comic collector, brought home the first edition of *Ms. Marvel* by Sana Amanat and G. Willow Wilson – and I was floored. The story of a teenage female Marvel superfan created by an American Pakistani woman and a White Islam convert hit the spot for me in a profound way. At last, South Asians who wanted to feel seen in comics were, well, seen.

I am a living, breathing version of Kamala Khan (without the superpowers) – stuck between two

worlds and questioning my identity regularly, from how to practice my ancient ancestral religion to balancing my parents' and society's expectations. The idea that girls can be geeks and like comics and action movies is something I embrace about this character, plus our code-switching lives make me feel like I'm living in the multiverse. In the MCU, *Ms. Marvel*'s origin story begins with her seeking adventure and breaking out of a cage,

'The idea that girls can be geeks and like comics and action movies is something I embrace'

like most Disney princesses, but she then has to develop her skills for a bigger battle alongside Carol Danvers and Monica Rambeau in *The Marvels* (coming in 2023). The idea of this is electric to me.

We've been fed a standardised Muslim character trope on screen for so long that *Ms. Marvel* is dazzling. The most often used is, of course, the Islamic Koranic verse-reciting fundamentalist characters committing heinous acts in films and TV shows like *24*, *Sleeper Cell*, *The West Wing*, *Homeland*, *True Lies*... need I go on? Then there's the tentative two steps forward, one step back – the disappointment when *Deadpool* gave us the Dopinder character based on Ryan Reynolds' IRL Indian friend but reduced to the tired comic-relief role of a stereotypical meek taxi driver.

Or the South Asian superhero writ large that is Kingo (played by Kumail Nanjiani) in *Eternals*, who's sadly just a Bollywood cliché. Don't get me started on convenience store clerks, tech-savvy nerds or class swots...

Ms. Marvel's Kamala turns this all on its head. To feel seen when we walk into the cinema or turn on a streaming platform is essential to all of our wellbeing as humans. Now we're seeing normalised Muslims, simply living their lives (admittedly, with added magical realism), beamed into our living rooms on a weekly basis. The show beautifully explores the cultural nuances of an Asian community; while Kamala's parents are recognisably strict, their overprotective nature is not oppression, they simply want her to be the best version of herself. Kamala's feisty and political hijab-wearing best friend Nakia who she goes to the Mosque with (how refreshing is this?!), is given the space to explain that she covers her head by choice. Another perfect piece of representation is Kamala's brother's fiancée Tyesha being Black. Being in an interracial relationship myself, it is so rare to see a Black & Asian couple happily in love, and this show does it without the stigma that is usually attached.

Kamala's mandate in the comics, as seen in *Ms. Marvel* Vol. 3 Issue 4, is a universal one shown through the lens of the Asian experience. "Ammi (Mum) and Abu (Dad) taught me to always think about the greater good," she says in that comic. "To defend people who can't defend themselves, even if it means putting yourself at risk. I wish they could see that that's exactly what I'm trying to do."

From one Asian woman to another: I see you, Kamala, and I applaud everything you're trying to do. Now, more please...



BIG CATS

Feline confident? Test your movie knowledge!



EASY

- 1 True or false? *Life Of Pi* earned Ang Lee his second Best Director Oscar.
- 2 What was the global box-office gross of 2019's *The Lion King*?
a) \$1.66bn; b) \$966m; c) \$1.96bn
- 3 Which 2020 lioness thriller shares its title with a 2007 big-croc flick?
- 4 What role connects Sebastian Cabot, Ben Kingsley and Christian Bale?
- 5 For which vintage comedy is animal performer Nissa the leopard best known?

MEDIUM

- 1 What is the title of the 1944 sequel to the original *Cat People*?
- 2 "Ain't nothing more goddamn frightening than driving with a live cougar in the car" is a quote from which movie?
- 3 What is the subtitle of 1998's *The Lion King II*?
- 4 Which 2003 feline flick won the Razzie for Worst Excuse For An Actual Movie?
- 5 Madonna co-stars with a big cat named Murray in which 1987 movie?

HARD

- 1 'See these eyes so green/I can stare for a thousand years...' Name the song title and artist.
- 2 Name the two co-directors of 1994's *The Lion King*.
- 3 Name the three actresses who played Catwoman over the course of the 1960s *Batman* TV series and movie.
- 4 Who provides the voice of Shere Khan in the 1994 adap of *The Jungle Book*?
- 5 Complete these titles: **a)** ___ & *Jaguar*; **b)** ___ *And The Leopard Woman*; **c)** ___ *And The Eye Of The Tiger*; **d)** *Eaten By* ___

ANSWERS: EASY 1. TRUE 2. A) \$1.66bn 3. ROGUE 4. BAGHEERA THE BLACK PANTHER 5. BRINGING UP BABY MEDIUM 1. THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE 2. TALLADEGA NIGHTS: THE LEGEND OF RICKY BOBBY 3. SIMBA'S PRIDE 4. THE CAT IN THE HAT 5. WHO'S THAT GIRL
HARD 1. CAT PEOPLE (PUTTING OUT FIRES) BY DAVID BOWIE 2. ROGER ALLERS, ROB MINKOFF 3. JULIE NEWMAR, LEE MERIWETHER, EARTHAKIT 4. NO ONE - NONE OF THE ANIMALS SPEAK IN THE MOVIE 5. A) AIMEE; B) TARZAN; C) SINBAD; D) LIONS

NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess these eight zoo scenes?



ANSWERS: 1. HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE 2. THE OMEN 3. THE GRADUATE 4. ROCKY II 5. ERASER 6. ANCHORMAN 7. WITHNAIL AND I 8. AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

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★ STAR LETTER

I've always been dubious about product placement or embedded marketing in movies, the actual efficacy of seeing a watch, car etc... But you know what? *Jurassic World Dominion* worked on me. One of the film's sponsors had strategically placed a WTF giant dino-chicken in the plot; at the end, I drove away like a Stepford Wife straight to a fast-food restaurant and ordered a gargantuan bucket of the Bluegrass State's finest fried chicken!

ELLIE PA-HA, VIA EMAIL



New game! What's the most impulsive purchase you've made because of a movie? New ottoman after *Raiders Of The Lost*

Ark? Bucket and spade, post-*Dune*? Thanks to Matt Damon, have you bought a zoo? Share those cine-shopping trips! Ellie and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *The Unbearable Weight Of Massive Talent*, out now on digital, SteelBook, 4K, Blu-ray and DVD via Lionsgate. Didn't send an address? Email it! Or it'll be your (unbearable) loss!

HAPPY HORROR-DAYS

Loved your feature, 'The Sum Of All Fears' in issue 326. It reminded me of a family holiday in Paignton, Devon, 1982. We stopped in a Butlin's-lite holiday village, where the management put on nightly film shows using a proper projector and reels. I was 11, my brother eight. My chilled-out (naive) parents allowed us to watch Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead*. My mum was horrified, my brother laughed maniacally all the way through and my love of horror films started on that night. My brother wasn't permitted to watch *Soldier Blue* the following night, though...

MARK COATES, HULL



We couldn't find an image from *Dawn Of The Dead*, so here's a picture from the buffet queue at Butlin's instead.



@Dr_McQuack

"Only walked out [of a cinema] once. Didn't know what *Twilight* was, went in, saw a shiny boy, left."

Zombie carnage followed by (to quote the poster), 'The Most Savage Film In History'? Where was this holiday village - by Camp Crystal Lake? Was Pennywise in charge of kids' entertainment? Glad you enjoyed the piece, anyhow. It was all done in strict accordance with *Scream*'s survival rules, i.e. no one was allowed to drink, do drugs or have sex while writing.

ESCAPE PLAN

I really enjoyed reading Matt Glasby's piece in the latest edition ('Intermission', issue 326). I think loneliness is something many experience but few would admit to. I've written in before about escaping post-lockdown by going to the cinema loads on my own. Lately I've been trying to go more often with good friends, for that glimmer of shared

experience that you can sometimes miss even when comfortable with a solitary activity. Escapism is something we all need - even the *Mean Girls*' Plastics must need a break from the exhaustion of popularity; likewise Rick Deckard in his search for answers.

GARETH MILNER, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for sharing your experience, Gareth. You've left us wondering what characters do to decompress; does Dom Toretto catch on up episodes of *Top Gear*? Does Elsa grab her Kindle and snuggle up in the nearest meat locker?

WATER COMEBACK

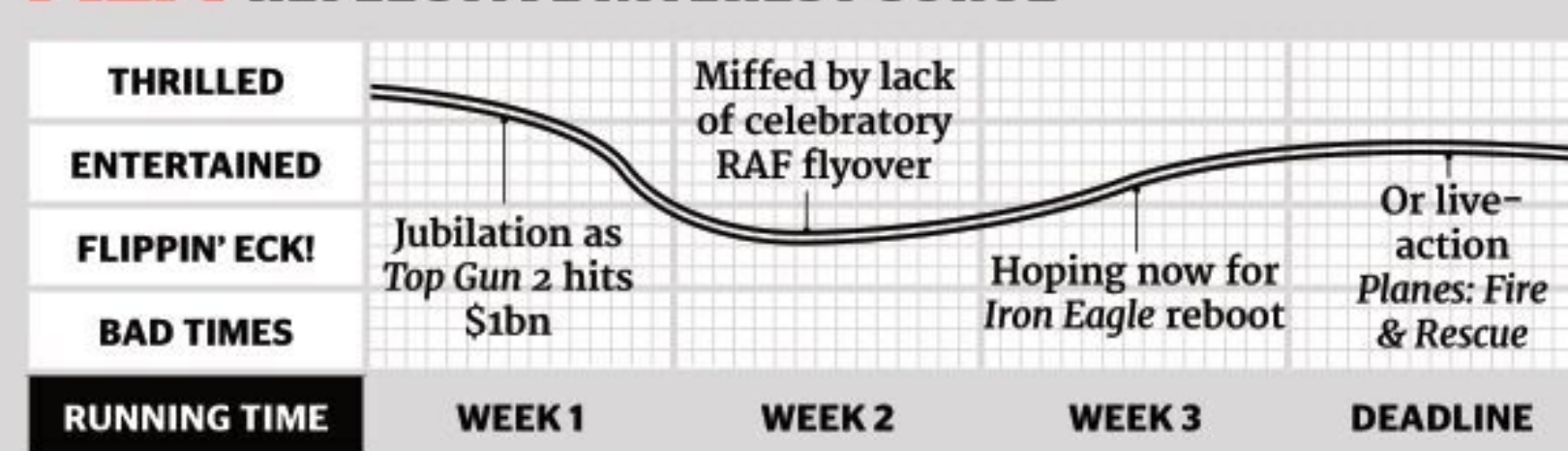
"You cannot quote me a single line from *Aquaman*," says James Gray [issue 326]. Well, I can. "Redheads! Gotta love 'em!"

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Impressions galore, from Elvis to Emma Thompson to Minions and back to Elvis again; movie-merch memories; and the worst film we've seen at a festival this year. Plus reviews and more... every week!



FILM REFLECTIVE INTEREST CURVE™





60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE. THIS ISSUE: **DOCTOR STRANGE IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS**

FADE IN:

EXT. A DIFFERENT UNIVERSE

A DIFFERENT BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE tries to help XOCHITL GOMEZ escape a monster. He dies instead. She then accidentally escapes into the real MCU.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE

Hey, I just had a dream about you.

XOCHITL GOMEZ

Dreams are you watching yourself in other universes so what you saw was real. I can prove it.

XOCHITL GOMEZ shows him the DEAD DIFFERENT BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE

Huh. OK. No further questions.

EXT. ORCHARD

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE visits ELIZABETH OLSEN to ask for help and also because superhero crossovers make more money.

ELIZABETH OLSEN

Happy to help. Why don't you bring Xochitl here so I can steal her power, go to a different universe and take my kids from a different me... oops!

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE

Wait, the kids that you invented in *WandaVision*? God, I hope everyone's done their homework.

EXT: KAMAR-TAJ, NEPAL

ELIZABETH OLSEN shows up and attacks all the sorcerers in creepy ways, allowing director Sam Raimi to go full Sam Raimi.

XOCHITL GOMEZ

I'd open a portal for us to escape but I don't know how to use my powers!

She accidentally opens a portal for them.

XOCHITL GOMEZ

Never mind.

EXT. A DIFFERENT DIFFERENT UNIVERSE

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE and XOCHITL



GOMEZ fall through a series of obscure Easter eggs before landing in just a slightly different version of New York.

XOCHITL GOMEZ

Let's go and find the other, other you, even though right now my experience of Doctor Stranges has been exactly 50:50.

They find CHIWETEL EJIOFOR who offers to help. He drugs them and takes them to the film's big fan-service moment.

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR

Cameos assemble! We have Captain Carter from *What If...?* and the big-voice guy from that show everyone hated. Also...

THE AUDIENCE

JOHN KRASINSKI IS MR. FANTASTIC!
AND PROFESSOR X IS BACK!! WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?!

ELIZABETH OLSEN shows up and immediately kills all of them.

THE AUDIENCE

Oh.

ELIZABETH OLSEN takes XOCHITL GOMEZ hostage and then sends BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE into one of the universes from *What If...?*

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE

God, I hope everyone's done their homework.

EXT. A DIFFERENT DIFFERENT DIFFERENT UNIVERSE

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE finds the version of himself that has an evil forehead eye. They fight each other with musical notes. It's baffling.

BAD CUMBERSTRANGE

The only way to save the girl is to use the evil magic book that I have. But it comes at a price. Mainly extra eyes.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE wins and uses the evil magic book to possess the body of DEAD DIFFERENT BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE from before.

ZOMBIE CUMBERSTRANGE

Don't worry, I'll save the day. And don't forget to buy your 'Doctor Strange's dead, rotting corpse' action figure, kids!

He frees XOCHITL GOMEZ who then makes ELIZABETH OLSEN scare her kids. ELIZABETH OLSEN then kills herself out of shame.

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE

Aww, she did the right thing. After killing lots of innocent people, she really was a hero after all.

EXT. NEW YORK - POST-CREDITS SCENE

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE walks down the street and suddenly grows a third eye in his forehead. CHARLIZE THERON appears.

CHARLIZE THERON

Hello, I'm... you know, it doesn't matter. I'm an A-list cameo. Now, let's go and have another adventure in a yet-to-be-determined TV show or film!

BENEDICT CUMBERSTRANGE

God, I hope everyone's ready for more homework...

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION

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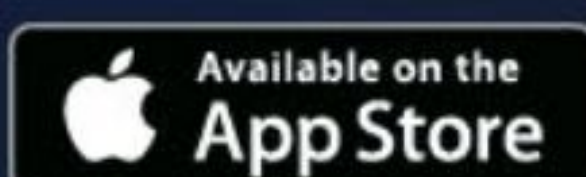
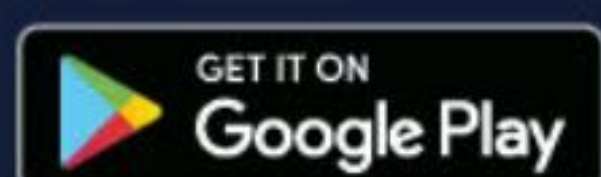


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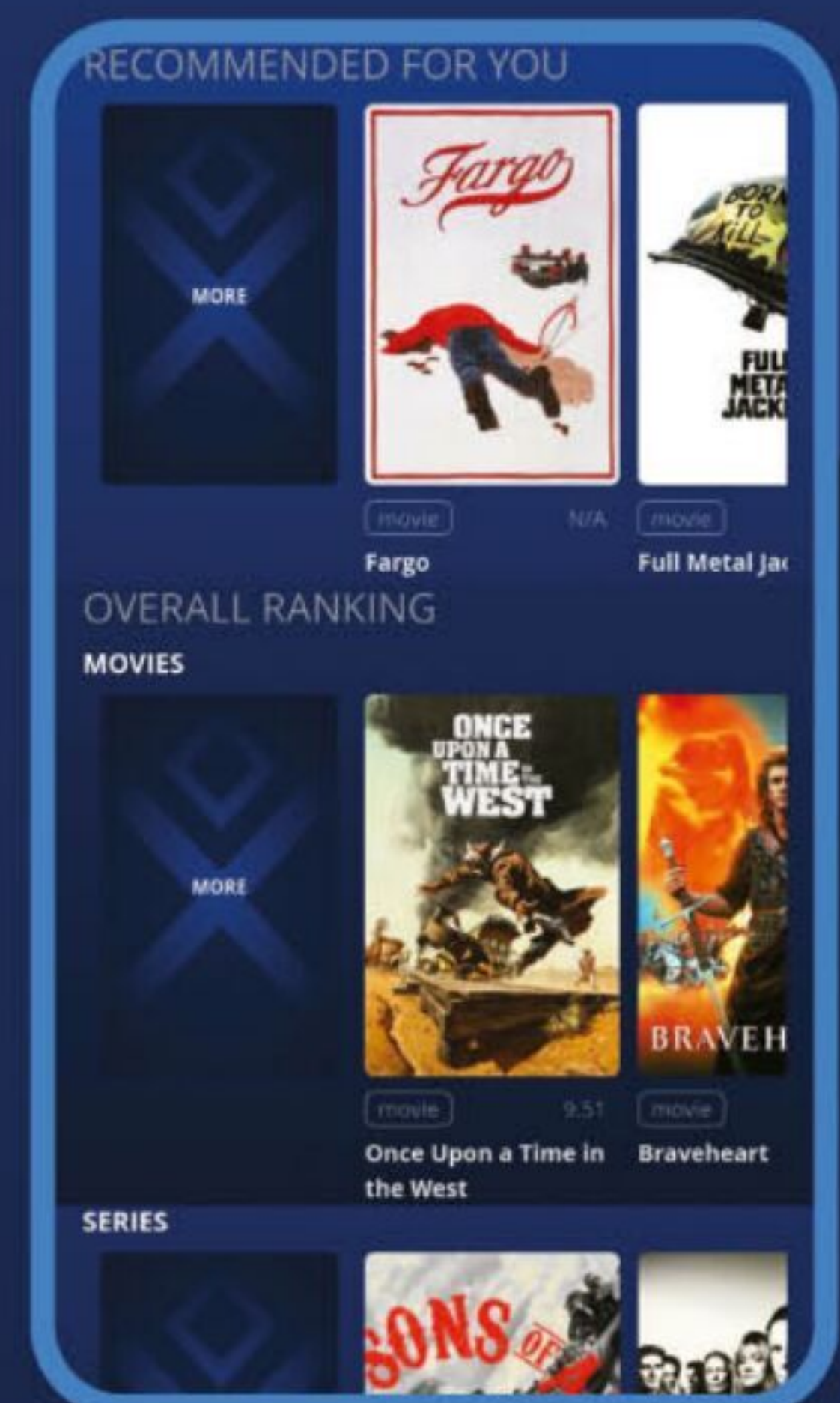
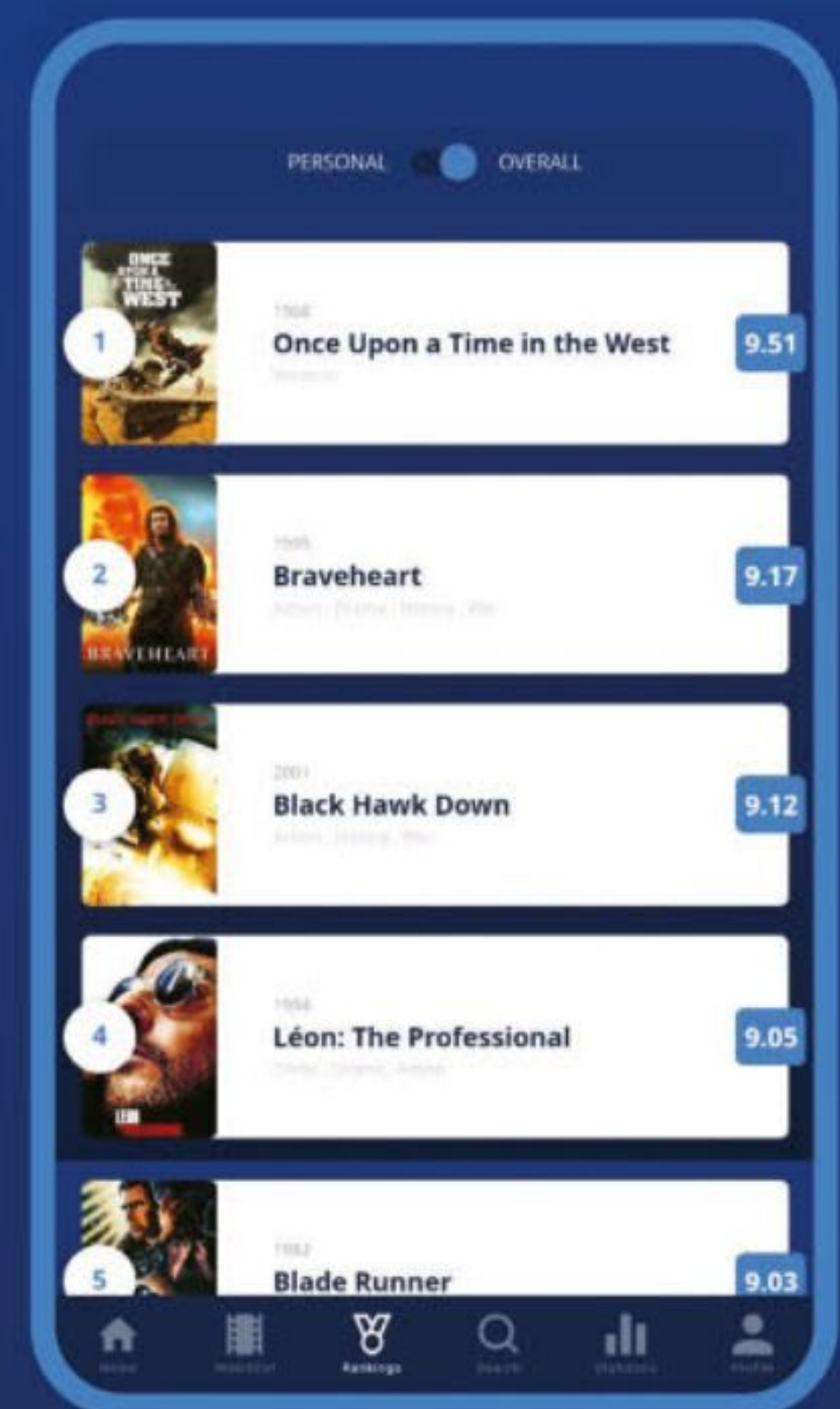
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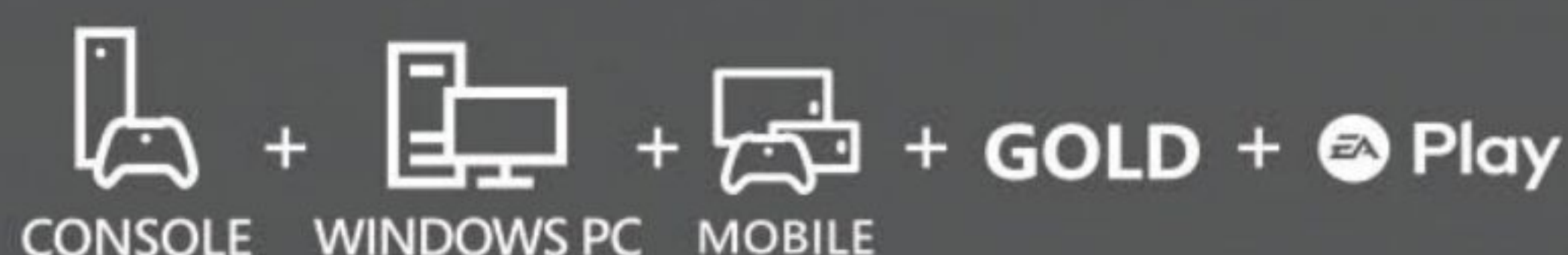
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